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# Alison Macleod

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# THE TRUSTED SERVANT

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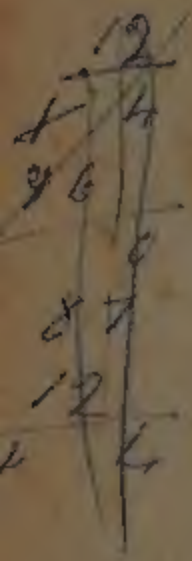

## THE TRUSTED SERVANT

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# The Trusted Servant

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## Alison Macleod

CORONET BOOKS
Hodder Paperbacks Ltd., London

**To Ruth Stella Selford**

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First published in Great Britain by
Hodder and Stoughton Ltd 1968
Coronet edition 1972

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Printed and bound in Great Britain for
Hodder Paperbacks Ltd,
St. Paul's House, Warwick Lane,
London, E.C.4
By Hunt Barnard Printing Ltd.,
Aylesbury, Bucks.

ISBN 0 340 15885 9

# 1

When I understood what it was I had to do, my first feeling was pride. I was trusted by my master. I was trusted by my King.

Not that the King himself could appear in the matter. My master said: "Forget that you ever saw him."

I could hardly forget that. It had happened only the day before, in the garden at Hampton Court. I was with my master, Thomas Cromwell, talking of a letter that I was to write for him, when the King came suddenly from behind a tall hedge, meeting us as if by chance. I had seen him, of course, many times, but never so close.

My master and I sank to our knees; my master kissed the King's hand; and then I saw the King hold out his hand for me to kiss as well. I was astounded at the honour. Scarcely believing my good fortune, I took that white flesh in my own lean hand, and blinked in the dazzle of rubies and emeralds, and felt the hardness of the stones against my lips.

A greater honour followed. The King called me by my name. "So you are Thomas Vaughan." Then he added, in Spanish: "I hear that you speak like a Spaniard, and write like one too, in a most elegant hand. Is this true?"

I was all this time so blinded by the splendour of his presence, that I could not look into the face of King Henry

the Eighth. Blinded, but not deafened. I could hear that he spoke Spanish very badly. He scarcely attempted the sounds that come from the back of the throat. I was puzzled what to do. Clearly he meant me to reply in Spanish, to show that I understood. But if I spoke the language as it naturally came to me, he might not understand. The worst thing of all was to keep silent. Already I could see the King's feet shift impatiently, and I heard my master catch his breath.

So I began to speak "like a Spaniard", only more clearly and slowly.

"May it please Your Grace," I said, "my mother (whose soul God pardon) was born in Spain, and spoke with me in her own language till the last day of her life. Besides, she kept a Spanish priest, who taught me to write."

"And Latin?" asked the King, using that language, "Do you understand Latin?"

"Very well, when I read it" I said. "But, because of that priest, I speak it with the accent of a Spaniard."

"And how do you speak French?" asked the King, who seemed pleased to display his own mastery of yet another language.

"Not so well as Your Grace," I answered with truth. (For in French his accent was good). "I have been told that in this too I sound like a Spaniard."

"Better and better!" the King exclaimed. Then he laughed, very pleasantly, and said in English: "How is it you haven't been pestering me for permission to travel abroad, like most of our learned young men?"

I told him I was far too poor for travel, my father having died so deep in debt that the moneylenders had all his estate. "If Mr. Cromwell had not taken me into his house," I said, "I might have begged my bread along the highways."

The King nodded, almost as if this too had pleased him, and then gave me leave to go. As I bowed myself out of his presence, I caught a look which passed between the King

and Mr. Cromwell. Then I saw them both look at me, in the same moment, with the same expression. I knew that I had been weighed in the balance and found... No! Not wanting. Surely not wanting.

No; I was fit for my task. Mr. Cromwell told me so, next day.

"It's a difficult thing," he said, "but I believe you can do it. That is, if you're willing."

He smiled, and I was willing at once, before I knew anything more.

To explain why a smile from a squat, ugly, bull-necked man should move me to a passion of obedient love, I must show what Mr. Cromwell had done for me. It is not enough to say that I found him a second father. He was the first man I ever found fatherly, and his house the first place where I ever felt at home.

# 2

In my own home, as a child, I cannot remember ever being happy. I was left to the mercy of the old Spanish priest. With God's love in his mouth and a cruel cane in his hand, he beat Latin and French into me, and beat them in wrong, so that well-bred people smiled when I spoke. I got little comfort from my father, who was always hunting, or from my mother, who was always ailing. She gave birth to a baby every year, but I was the only strong one; all the others died.

When I was fourteen she told me she was dying too. My father said I should not believe her; she was forever saying the same thing. I was not sure. I sat beside her, listening to the talk my father would no longer listen to. How glorious her life had been, at the court of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella! How they had honoured her by choosing her to be a lady in waiting to their daughter, the Princess Catalina! And to think she would have cut off her right hand rather than set sail to England with the Princess, if only she had known!

As my mother became weaker she forgot her English and talked only in Spanish. If I had learned nothing else in that language, I would know how to describe the hat Princess Catalina wore when she rode into London. "It was a

broad round hat, the shape of a cardinal's hat, tied with a lace of gold which kept it on her head, and under the hat she wore a coif of a carnation colour, and this gold and this carnation did not dim, but made more beautiful, the reddish gold of her own hair."

I heard this every day. But one day there was a change. My mother roused herself and dictated a letter, which I wrote down, in Spanish. It was to a lady called Maria, and asked simply for forgiveness. Without that (my mother said) she could not die in peace. Only the outside of the letter was in English. "To my Lady Willoughby de Broke, at Eresby by Spilsby, in the County of Lincoln." When my father came in from hunting that night my mother asked him to send the letter by a servant.

Dad stormed. Hadn't she already brought him into debt with her Spanish dwarf, her pet monkeys, her useless old priest? Was this the time to do such an extravagant thing as sending a letter?

"It is only thirty miles away," my mother said.

"Eresby is" agreed my father. "But she may be in her London house, or further away still, in her other house at Parham. And God knows what other houses the woman has; she is one of the richest widows in England. My man might have to ride the length and breadth of the country before he finds her."

My mother said that was why she could not send the letter by the common post. Then she told my father that, if she died ill at ease, he would have to spend twice the usual amount on masses for her soul. She went on saying it, as a wheel without grease will squeak every time it comes round. Two days later the servant set out.

There was no letter in reply. Instead there was a squelch and a spatter of horses in the mud of our lane. A lady rode through our gate on a splendid horse. Behind her came a physician in a robe, and our servant who had guided her to

our door, and some half-dozen servants of her own. Maids and grooms, they were all alike well-mounted, and in costly livery, with their lady's monogram worked in silver thread on their sleeves.

The lady alighted and looked up at the broken porch of our house, and down at the mud which overflowed our threshold. Then she gathered up the skirts of her riding habit and said: "Tell Lady Vaughan that Lady Willoughby is here to see her."

My mother was too ill for visitors, but who ever thought of saying no to Lady Willoughby? She swept into the bedroom, crying out: "Beatriz!" My mother whispered: "Maria!"

Soon Lady Willoughby's physician was examining my mother, and Lady Willoughby's maids were brewing possets under his direction. At supper-time the lady herself sat feeding my mother spoonful by spoonful, talking to her in Spanish, never thinking how much I understood. Indeed at first she did not see me; I kept out of sight behind the hangings of the bed. I had been chased out of the room once or twice already but I had crept back again to look at Lady Willoughby. She was the sort of woman I had always wanted for a mother. Splendidly dressed, moving in a stately glide, she nevertheless understood the ways of sick-room and kitchen. The provisions that she brought from her own estate (they came after she did, creaking along in a great farm cart) were good venison and tender capons. When she told our cook how to prepare them, she spoke like any sensible farmer's wife. And her arm, supporting my bedraggled mother on the bed, was the arm of a good nurse.

Lady Willoughby had been Doña Maria de Salinas, and, like my mother, maid of honour to the Princess Catalina. All their talk was of the time when they first arrived in England, twenty-six years before.

"Do you remember," said Lady Willoughby, "When we learned the English way of dancing? All that leaping in the air!"

My mother almost laughed. "Do *you* remember," she said, "how horrified you were when the young man you danced with took you by the waist?"

"And kissed me! That was the worst. We thought English girls were shameless to let themselves be kissed whenever they said good morning or good evening."

"Or any time between!" my mother said.

Then they began to talk about the bad days, after the Princess's first husband had died.

"Seven lean years!" my mother said. "Seven years a widow in a strange land, living like a beggar."

"Do you remember when we had stinking fish to eat, because the wicked old King of England had stopped her allowance? Stinking fish off golden plates!"

"But oh!" my mother cried out. "Why did we make it worse by quarrelling among ourselves? All those tales, that scandal . . . I never could find a scandal to tell about you, so I made up lies. Oh, forgive me, Maria, forgive me!"

"I will—I do—but you must forgive me in return. I know I was very spiteful."

"No; it was my fault. I was jealous of you, because the Princess always loved you best. Oh, if only I'd been faithful to her, like you! If only I'd waited! I ran away with this great stupid country squire, because he was the only man fool enough to take me without a dowry."

Lady Willoughby said: "I thought you loved him."

"Never! Never! I was tired of being nobody, of having nothing. The old King of England grudging us every penny, and no money ever coming from Spain! How was I to know that in two months the wicked old King would die? What

a glorious life you must have had afterwards! Maria—what was it like?"

"It's hard to remember now," Lady Willoughby said. "It was all so strange . . . like a dream. We were so dazed we scarcely said a thank you when the young King showered us with jewels. And then he married our Princess and we all danced again, because at last she was truly Queen of England."

"And you had a dowry, and married a great lord," my mother sobbed. "Oh, if only the Queen would forgive me for deserting her when I did! I might get better if I thought she'd let me share even a little of her happiness!"

"What happiness?" asked Lady Willoughby. "The Queen can't help any of us now. I only wish that she could help herself." Seeing my mother's amazement she asked: "Haven't you heard the news from London?"

"We never hear any news, good or bad, in this hole," my mother complained.

Lady Willoughby said: "The King is going to divorce her."

"What for?"

"For being older than he is. For growing ugly. For having too many babies, and only one left alive."

My mother crossed herself. "God help us all!" she said. "If a man can turn his wife out when she grows old and ugly . . ." Her fingers forgot the cross; I saw them move uncertainly about her wasted cheeks.

"Of course the King has a pretence of a reason," said Lady Willoughby. "He says the last Pope did wrong to let him marry his brother's widow. So *this* Pope can easily say it was all a mistake; the last Pope was misled; the marriage was null from the beginning."

"But . . . we all knew at the time why the marriage was allowed," my mother said. "Our Princess was not really Prince Arthur's widow, because she'd never really been his wife. That first marriage was a form, not consummated."

"Of course," Lady Willoughby agreed. "When she married King Henry, she was a virgin."

My mother murmured: "I can understand how the other story got about. She was so innocent, our Princess! After that first wedding they put her to bed with Prince Arthur. Do you remember how pale and ill he looked? A boy of—was it fourteen?"

"Fifteen," Lady Willoughby said.

"Do you remember how he huddled over to his own side? And was there still in the morning? But poor little Catalina thought, because she'd spent all night in the same bed, she was a wife! After Prince Arthur died she told her confessor that she might have a baby to console her."

"I remember that," said Lady Willoughby. "I remember how she cried when the duenna told her that she had not done enough to get a baby."

"But the King must know!" my mother said. "He must know that Catalina came to him a virgin!"

"Of course he knows! And the Pope must know he knows! But the King has been sending the Pope so much money . . ."

"Will His Holiness really do such a thing for money?"

"His Holiness! Giulio de' Medici! Another Pope from that family! What can you expect from any of them? Already he's telling the Queen that her only hope is to do as the King wants and retire into a convent. But he'll say anything for money! It's no wonder the young people are turning Lutheran. You have to admit that some of the things Luther says . . ."

But here Lady Willoughby looked round for eavesdroppers and found me in the curtains. So I was chased out of the room again, just as I was beginning to take an interest. I had thought their talk, till then, very tedious. Their beloved Princess Catalina sounded like a stupid little doll. I thought that if, like this prince of my age, I had been tucked up with her, I would have kept to my own side of the bed. I felt

sorry for our King, who now had to spend so much money to get rid of dull, ugly Catalina—Queen Katherine of Aragon.

My mother died a few days later, towards the end of June, 1527. I was not surprised. She had never been there when I needed her, and she was not there now.

At the funeral feast nobody talked about her. They were all exchanging stories about the sack of Rome. It had happened six weeks before, but the news had only begun to trickle into our village. We heard of nuns raped, priests tossed on pikes, drunken German soldiers yelling for "Pope Luther" under the windows of the real Pope. I liked to hear the stories; I could fancy very well how our old Spanish priest would look wriggling on the end of a pike.

But who had sacked Rome, and why? Lady Willoughby had just received a letter from a friend at court, and she explained. The Emperor of Germany was making war against the French. The Pope had joined the French against the Emperor. The Emperor's troops won, and surged ahead out of control. (For the Emperor himself was far away, guarding his other country, Spain). Unpaid and mutinous, the troops burst into all the holy places, and their officers with difficulty stopped them from killing the Pope himself.

As the guests grew more drunk, some of them ventured to ask Lady Willoughby about the other rumour, which to the country people sounded far more horrifying—that the King was asking for a divorce.

"It's true," Lady Willoughby said. "But—thank God!—the Pope will have to do the Queen justice, in spite of himself. He is in the power of the German Emperor now. And the German Emperor is our Queen's nephew."

A neighbouring squire, his wits as muddy as his boots, gaped at her. "Are you sure?"

"Why should I not be sure?" said Lady Willoughby. "I am cousin to both Emperor and Queen."

My father glowed with pride, thinking (I suppose) that

such a well-born lady would not ask him to return the money he had borrowed. For the next four years, when anybody tried to talk to him about his debts, he would hint at some scheme he had for marrying me to an heiress. I do not know how he could live so long in the world without finding out that great heiresses marry great heirs.

Perhaps he was dreaming of Lady Willoughby's daughter Kate, a child seven years younger than myself. But she was not even in her mother's power to bestow. Since her father was dead, and she the sole heir, she must, by law, have a male guardian. This was Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, husband of the King's sister. The Duke intended to marry little Kate Willoughby to his son—also still a child, and sickly, but a splendid match. I had no more chance of ever possessing Kate Willoughby than the boy who carried the logs up for her fire.

A horse my father had not paid for threw him and broke his neck. I was eighteen, and alone, when the moneylenders pounced.

Lady Willoughby did what she could for me. She could not get me a place at court; being the Queen's friend, she was out of favour with the King. But through the Duke of Suffolk she heard all the court gossip, and she knew that Thomas Cromwell, one of the Privy Counsellors, would soon be the only one of importance. He was already courted by foreign ambassadors; he needed a secretary who understood Spanish.

So I went to live in Mr. Cromwell's house, within the precincts of the Augustinian friary off Old Broad Street, in the City of London. I do not say that Mr. and Mrs. Cromwell treated me like a son, because their own son, Gregory, lived in a little Essex village with his tutor and seldom came to town. Whereas I shared their bustling life, in their well-ordered home.

Mrs. Cromwell, a fat little woman, spoke little and seldom

raised her voice. But we secretaries and keepers of accounts, who gathered round the lower end of Cromwell's table twice a day, felt her presence as a benediction. It was her doing that the game pies were cooked right through, yet never burned on the outside. It was her doing that the meat was roasted evenly, not black on one side and red on the other because the turnspit had been playing cards—a thing which happened often in my mother's kitchen. The dishes came to us, of course, only after the guests of honour had been served. But never once were we left short. There was always plenty left for the servants in the kitchen, and something over for the beggars at the gate. And everything was paid for. Whenever I passed the kitchen entrance of the house, Mrs. Cromwell would be there, talking to some butcher or miller or fishmonger, and always looking these tradesmen merrily in the eye.

Mrs. Cromwell did not sit at our end of the table (as the custom is in some families) but near her husband's right hand, with the guest of honour in between. So, at our end, there was not much to restrain our tongues. We had the company of a red-nosed ruffian, Tom Willey, who said he was a priest. He did not dress like one, and nobody called him Father Willey. Beery Willey, more like. He had been hired by Mr. Cromwell to write pamphlets and ballads and interludes, presenting the King's case against the Pope. It was only a year or two since Cardinal Wolsey's death, and in his time there had been stake and faggots ready for any Englishman who said a word against His Holiness. After years of living in exile or disguise, after trailing pikes in foreign armies, and starving from town to town as a player, Beery Willey could hardly believe his luck. He used to look at the great fires at either end of the hall, at the servants bringing in more dishes, at the food on the table. Then he would begin to laugh. He would shake with laughter, until he could hardly drink his beer. "It's just to think of myself *here*," he said.

Once, when he was more drunk than usual, he added: "And to think, all the time that Mr. Cromwell was lawyer to old Wolsey, he was on our side at heart."

We all tried to shush him. "Our side" was not a thing to be said. Our master served the King; so did Sir Thomas More, who was Lord Chancellor still. All the King's servants were on the same side. We knew, of course, that if Willey had not been under Mr. Cromwell's protection, Sir Thomas More would have burned him, as he burned every heretic he could reach.

"What would you say," I whispered to Willey, "if Lord Chancellor More were to summon you to his house, and ask you what you believe?"

"Why, then I should say . . . 'My Lord Chancellor,' I should say, 'I am a poor ignorant man. I am ignorant of things which I trust hereafter to know, as I know things of which I have been ignorant heretofore. I once thought the Pope Christ's vicar and Lord of all the world, so that if he deprived the King of his crown, or you of the Great Seal, it would be enough, since he could do no wrong. Now I might be entreated to think otherwise. I have thought that if I had been a friar in a cowl I could not have been damned. nor afraid of death. Now I might be . . . hired to think otherwise. They say my Lord the Bishop of London himself once thought that by God's law a man might marry his brother's widow, but now he dares think the contrary—which in the days of Cardinal Wolsey would have cost him either a fire or a faggot.' "

Willey's voice was now so loud that everyone at the table was listening. When he stopped we all laughed openly, except my master, who laughed into his napkin. He wagged his finger at Willey, to be more careful. So, to steer Willey off religion, we began to ask him about his life in foreign parts. He had a new story to tell us every day. This time it was:

"When I was with the French army, near Avignon,

King François was after the mayor's daughter. She was so much afraid of him that she put acid on her face to spoil her looks."

"You expect us to believe that? Is there such a thing in the world as a woman who'd spoil her own face?"

"Ah! But she knew that if she were to catch what he's got, her face would be spoiled for certain."

And so the talk would end where (at our end of the table), it always ended, with women. The women that kings had. (Not our own King, of course; even Beery Willey had to be very drunk before he would make jokes about Mary Boleyn, sister of Anne.) The women who came every day, pretending to be laundresses, to the Austin friars beside whom we lived. The women we ourselves had, or hoped to have . . .

Mrs. Cromwell kept some plump and pretty maids. In my own home the maids had been greasy, stinking creatures, trailing through the mud in my mother's cast-off rags. (Which they lay down to sleep in, too.) I now learned that a maid, however hard her work, might be neatly dressed in good homespun, and wash her face every day. Mrs. Cromwell knew very well how lustfully we looked at these girls. Every night she went up to the attic, and made sure that each maid was in her place, on her straw pallet. Then she locked them in, and slept with the key under her pillow. But she could not be everywhere, all day long. The house had its cupboards and dark corners, and in our own dormitory we (not being common servants) had four-poster beds with curtains round them. Sometimes in the sleepy time after dinner it was possible to lure a girl inside these curtains, and make day as good as night. Soon I grew hardened, like the others, and lamented not the sin, but the lack of opportunity to sin more often.

Most of our time, it's true, we spent in work, and some of this work was mere tedious copying. But it might not be. Every day was like a journey into an unknown country.

Sometimes, when Mr. Cromwell rode to court, he would take two or three of us secretaries with him, in case he wanted an interpreter, or someone to make notes. It was a splendid thing to ride out early on a frosty morning, and come clattering into the stable yard of Whitehall, and see the grooms run forward to take our horses, with bows of reverence (which grew deeper every time, for Mr. Cromwell was becoming a very great man). Then we would leave our riding boots and sword belts with the porter, and follow Mr. Cromwell up the great staircase, and see courtiers and noblemen make way for him, and watch how everybody turned to look as he entered the great hall. The King would not yet be there; he had breakfast in his own apartments. Until he came everyone would pay court to Thomas Cromwell, bowing to him, presenting petitions (which he handed over to us), whispering news and gossip into his ear.

When the King himself appeared, Thomas Cromwell would sink to his knees like everyone else. But then the King, having motioned us all to rise, would beckon Mr. Cromwell to the steps of the throne. And we secretaries, keeping our proper distance, would have the satisfaction of seeing our master envied, admired, feared by everyone in the court, while he whispered into the King's ear. Sometimes the King would take our master into his private apartments. Then we secretaries would be left to gossip with pages, and to look at the attendants of the Lady Anne Boleyn. Only to look, for these were golden girls, lapped in velvet and girdled with jewels, with fathers and brothers to guard them against any suitor without a fortune. My fortune was all to make, and I meant to make it. I meant to see the day when one of these noblemen would be glad to offer me his daughter, and a great estate with her.

Sometimes one of us would be fetched into the King's apartments, to write down what His Grace and Mr. Cromwell had decided. Then I would see the proudest of

the courtiers—even Lord Montague and Sir Geoffrey Pole, who let nobody forget that they were second cousins to the King—make way for a simple secretary. But this honour came to the older, discreeter secretaries, not to me. Mr. Cromwell preferred to use me for interpreting, or for seeing people whom he did not wish to see. The richer he grew, the more he was pestered by people who wanted something. "You see to it, Tom," he would say when he got a letter like this, from a parish priest:

"A poor neighbour of mine, whose name is Thomas Crumvell, in my parish of Laxton, who has a poor living of four marks a year, and is thought to be a kinsman of yours, desires your help. Sir Will Meryng writes to you in his behalf."

"What a vile scrawl!" said Mr. Cromwell. "None of these priests can write English. Nor can you, Tom, for all your good spelling of Latin and French and Spanish. You spell an English word one way today, another way tomorrow—and next Wednesday week you'll change your mind again."

"Sir," I said, "I was taught to write Latin and French and Spanish, but nobody ever taught me to write my own tongue. I put down what it sounds like, as near as I can."

"That's what you all say," said Mr. Cromwell. "All you sons of gentlemen. And what's the result? We *have* no spelling. I don't know myself whether my name is Cromwell or Crumvell, or 'a crumb well set in the King's throat' as the ballad singers call me. And this man who claims kinship may be kin to me or not; there was nothing written down when he was born, and there won't be when he dies. God help me, I mean to see the day when we have a written language, and written records too. In the meantime all we have is reputation, and I can't yet afford a reputation for meanness to my kinsfolk. See this man, Tom. See what he's good for. I suppose he's already on his way to us."

He was. He arrived the same day, a little hunched, frightened man, clutching the promised letter from Sir

William Meryng, a country squire who had met my master once or twice. The letter said: "I beseech you to be good master to my neighbour the bearer, your poor kinsman, and to take him into your service." There was a postscript. "Be good to the bearer, who is matched to one of the most falsest and proudest caitiffs in the world."

I did not see how my master could give work to a man who had nothing to recommend him except poverty and a desire to get away from his wife. As usual in these cases, I gave little "Crumvell" nothing except an invitation to sit beside me at supper. Over the meal I tried to find out what he was fit for. "Anything!" he said. "I'll do anything!" He owned he was no great hand at writing, and did not speak any foreign language. After supper I presented him to my master, who pressed his hand, smiled graciously, and led me aside for a private consultation.

"Sir," I said, "One of the estates the King has given you is a small one, hard to reach, in the County of Durham. Send this kinsman of yours to collect the rents. If he brings the money back, he's honest, and you can employ him. If he runs away with the money, it's lost, but you will be rid of him as well."

My master laughed, and said: "But supposing he brings back *some* rent, and lets the rest stick to his own fingers?"

"Then," I said, "you'll know that he's like the rest of the world, and since you can rule all the rest, you can rule him."

"Tom," said my master, "you'll end on the gallows for sure." But I noticed he took my advice.

I could not solve every problem so happily. One day the man who sat as chief guest at Mr. Cromwell's table was timid and poor-looking, in a shabby old robe. He looked dark and foreign, and I overheard Mr. Cromwell talking to him in a language I did not know.

After dinner Mr. Cromwell called me into his closet. The shabby guest was there, and, as I came in, he looked at me

with great melancholy eyes. I bowed to him as deeply as I could.

"That's right, Tom!" said Mr. Cromwell. "Do him honour; he's here on a very important mission. I suppose you've never met a Jew before?"

I could not help it; I crossed myself. Mr. Cromwell laughed. "Oh, he's baptised!" he said. "He won't hurt you."

Thinking the guest understood no English, I said: "But a real born Jew? With a bloody mark on his chest?"

The guest rose, bowed to me, and pulled his shirt open, to show a chest less hairy than my own, and certainly unmarked. I stammered out my apologies, thinking what a fool I had been to believe a tale told me in childhood by the old Spanish priest.

When Mr. Cromwell had done laughing at me he said: "Now, Tom, it's time for you to make amends. Our visitor has to see the King tomorrow, to expound the meaning of the Hebrew texts about marriage to a brother's wife. He's a very great scholar, the greatest in Venice, but . . . perhaps no great courtier. Now, you know how people dress at court. You know the tailors where I have credit. Take him there and have him fitted out. Do it well, Tom, for my sake. I'm responsible. I sent for him."

I took the Jew, whose baptised name was Marco Rafael, along Cheapside. I ordered fine lawn shirts of the kind the King wore, to be made for him that very day. Then he was measured for a doublet. I chose the material—a fine wool, red as wine, so that it would look splendid when they slashed it to show puffed white satin underneath. We ordered a short velvet cloak, in the same red as the doublet, and clocked white hose, and shovel shoes in soft red leather, and a hat with a white plume in it, fit to take off to a King.

While the tailor was cutting out the doublet, Marco said that he would like to walk outside the city. He spoke English

well enough, and, when he could not find a word, he made me understand him in Latin. So we talked very pleasantly as we went along the footpath to Islington. It was a dull day, with nothing much to look at, for the harvest was just over and the trees had scarcely begun to turn. But Marco cried out: "How beautiful it is in England!"

"What, in the city?" I said. "We have some fine new buildings."

Marco smiled. (Later, when I saw Venice, I wondered how he could refrain from laughing in my face). "There is not much stone for building here," he said gently. "But you have this grass. This wonderful grass! Does it never turn brown, even in the autumn? And these green, green trees . ."

We came to a poor sort of thatched cottage, where an old woman was sitting on the doorstep, eating bread and cheese. "Good day to you!" she mumbled through her munching.

"God send you a good appetite!" I said.

She wiped her mouth and said: "I always have a good appetite for my own bread and cheese. God knows how hard I work to make it, so He gives me the enjoyment."

Marco asked if he might buy one of her cheeses. She took us into her dairy, which (unlike her house) was fairly clean, and built of brick. Marco picked out a little round cheese, not too heavy to carry away. She swore it would last six months, and so it might, for it was the hard kind that common labourers eat.

"Now I have something English to take home with me," Marco said. "What a wonderful country! She was eating real wheaten bread. And in the open air!"

"The common people do most things in the open," I said. "Their houses are too small and smoky and stinking."

"But to see a peasant eating openly!" Marco cried out. "She doesn't think that soldiers will come by and snatch the bread out of her hand. Why, in this happy country none of you know what a soldier looks like."

"You'll see soldiers guarding the King tomorrow" I said, rather sharply. "Besides, we're all in the trained bands. We drill every Sunday afternoon."

"Oh yes, I have seen that," Marco said. "On my way here from Dover I saw men practising with bows and arrows. Bows and arrows!" This time he did laugh out loud.

As we turned back he expressed his delight once more, because the wagons bringing grain into London had no armed men to guard them.

"Even the walls of your City are crumbling away!" he said. "How long is it since you had any need of them?"

"I suppose more than fifty years," I said. I was ashamed that I did not know exactly. But just as I had not been taught to write my own tongue, I had not been taught to read my own history. "I know that the Wars of York and Lancaster went on a long time," I said.

"You have had war in the past, then?" Marco said. "You do know what a blessing it is, to have peace? Then there is hope for you. Now that I have seen a country without soldiers, I shall have hope even for poor Italy."

After supper that night I heard the Jew say to Cromwell: "If I were in your place, sir, I would not be too hasty in making changes. England as it is appears to me no less than Paradise."

Mr. Cromwell smiled, as he did when anyone said he was making changes too fast. It was the smile of a bold rider, who knows he can control a stallion.

The tailor brought Marco's new clothes the next morning. They fitted him well enough. But he could not wear them, somehow, as if they belonged to him. His shoulders kept hunching and shifting, as if they missed his old gown.

Afterwards I heard that his visit to court had not been a success. True, he expounded the text in Leviticus, which says that a man must not marry his brother's widow, but he also harped on the text in Deuteronomy, which says that he must.

Fortunately there were other learned men who could quote other parts of the Bible. I heard that the King was paying out great sums of money to foreign universities to obtain unbiased opinions.

The University of Paris had been among the first to declare for the King. The man who had managed that business, Reginald Pole, came to dinner with my master. We had sturgeon and roast swan, and wine instead of ale, because Reginald Pole was second cousin to the King.

I envied him, not for his royal blood, but because the maids, as they waited at table, were whispering: "How tall he is! What golden hair! What blue eyes! He has a face like an angel in a picture."

So he had—a dreamy, silly face. I might be black-avised, one eyebrow cocking skywards and my nose as crooked as Reginald Pole's was straight, but I felt sure I looked more lusty and alive. And why did the women praise his height? I was just as tall.

This angel, when anyone spoke to him, answered slowly, as if collecting his thoughts from a great way off. Being so far down the table, I heard little of the conversation. But I did hear Mr. Cromwell say: "You made them change their minds at Paris!"

Reginald Pole blushed like a girl and stammered: "I had very little to do with it. All the real work was done by Mr. Edward Foxe."

I thought that likely enough. Nobody would expect a man with such a face to carry out important business.

I hinted as much to my master the next day. "He's useful to the King, though," Mr. Cromwell said. "The man who looks like a saint is never to be despised. Get him on your side—and you'll have people thinking that your own actions are saintly. Besides, Reginald Pole is respected for his learning. He's been to all the universities. Oxford, Paris, Padua . . . He speaks Italian better than I do. But then, I

speak a soldier's Italian. It's a wicked country, Tom; I was a right ruffian when I was there." Mr. Cromwell laughed. I wanted to know more of his past life, but he instantly gave me some copying to do.

At court, Reginald Pole turned out even worse than the Jew. Something happened between him and the King. What it was nobody could say except those two people, since they were alone together. But the King told Mr. Cromwell afterwards that he had been so provoked that his hand had gone to his dagger. I never heard, then or later, that King Henry killed anyone with his own hands. He must have been put past all patience, even to think of such a thing.

"If the King had run him through for his insolence," Mr. Cromwell said, "it would have been no more than he deserved. It was black ingratitude, when you think what the King has done for that family. Made Pole's mother Countess of Salisbury in her own right, made his elder brother Lord Montague, his younger brother a knight... And all for being his cousins, which, to some kings, would seem rather a reason to destroy them. You know what the King was offering young angel-face? The Archbishopric of York! A fine time to start calling names!"

Later we heard that Reginald Pole had apologised, and been allowed to leave the country. "I hope," Mr. Cromwell muttered, "that he knows how lucky he is."

These were trifling setbacks in the struggle for the King's divorce, which meant the struggle for England's independence of Rome.

Soon after I first came to live in Mr. Cromwell's house, in 1531, the King persuaded the clergy to call him "Head of the Church." But they added: "So far as the law of Christ will allow." For two years more I watched my master prepare for the final break. At last it was no longer a matter of learned opinions, but of power. Should the King be truly King of his own country, or should he be half a King, with

his priests and monks only half his subjects, because they owed allegiance to Rome? We knew—all of us at the lower end of the table—that our master was embattled as an Englishman, against foreign domination.

A great obstacle was removed from his path in May, 1532, when Sir Thomas More gave up the chancellorship. A few days later Mr. Cromwell doubled the size of his house, by leasing more property from the Austin Friars.

Now he could entertain his guests more splendidly. The Earl of Wiltshire came to supper, with his handsome son, Lord Rochford, and his daughter, the Lady Anne Boleyn.

They brought their family chaplain, Father Cranmer, who still dressed as a simple priest though he was now a person of some standing, and had been abroad on missions for the King. When the tables were taken up, and the rushes swept aside for the dancing, I hung back. I could dance well enough, but I doubted if my master wanted me to dance amid such important people. Then I saw that Father Cranmer too was hanging back in a corner, alone. So I began to talk to him. He said frankly: "I should be used to these grand occasions—and yet I'm still timid. The fact is, I'm afraid of everything except my horse. *He* won't throw me. But people . . . I had all the courage beaten out of me by a cruel schoolmaster."

This was the first priest I ever took a liking to. We talked about our cruel schoolmasters, and Father Cranmer told me there was a new way now of teaching children, by kindness.

The smoke whirled from one of the great fires, and out of the smoke, into the light of the torches, danced the Lady Anne Boleyn. She was leaping in a galliard with her brother. When she came close to Father Cranmer and me, she waved at us and smiled, as graciously as if she were already Queen.

"A truly pious lady," Father Cranmer said. "You cannot think how many learned questions she has asked me about the Gospels."

Afterwards my master said to me: "You've got an eye for a beautiful woman, Tom. Have you ever seen one lovelier?"

In fact I had. Among the maids who crowded into the doorway to peep at Anne Boleyn, there was one face I thought more beautiful than hers. It belonged to Mrs. Cromwell's new sewing maid, Margaret, who had refused, so far, to let me touch her. Anne Boleyn was thinner than this maid, and paler, and her big dark eyes, though they sparkled, were not carefree. But I liked to watch her head turn on her slender neck. And I liked to think of her as our new Queen. She was young; she talked gaily and laughed often, unlike what I had heard of dull old Queen Katherine. Best of all, she was English. I joined my master in praising her.

"You've got brains, Tom!" he said. "I saw you making friends with the most important man in the kingdom."

"Who—Father Cranmer?"

"Didn't you know that he gave the King the idea of consulting foreign universities? One bright thought like that—and a man's made for life."

It was not long after this that Cranmer was made Archbishop of Canterbury, consecrated by the Pope, and swearing obedience to him. A few days later he defied the Pope, to announce King Henry's divorce from Katherine of Aragon, and to acknowledge Anne Boleyn as Queen. Katherine of Aragon, hidden away in a remote country house, was nothing but Prince Arthur's widow, and was to be called "Princess Dowager."

My master was now such a great man that not only did petitioners give him bribes to put their views before the King—they gave me bribes, to put their views before my master. And, just as he accepted his bribes, I accepted mine. Both of us would have thought it wrong to let the bribes affect our actions. Our sworn duty was clear; mine to my master, and his to the King. But if people were too silly to see that bribing

us made no difference, why should we not enjoy the money? They might otherwise have laid it before a saint's image, which could not help them either.

I began to lend money out at interest to a goldsmith in Lombard Street. I dressed well, too; and now and again I bought little trinkets for the sewing maid, Margaret. She took them blushing, her eyes downcast—but she took them. She admitted that she liked me. "But what's to come of it?" she said.

I had no doubt what was to come of it, but for a long time I could not persuade her to more than a kiss. One fine June day I set out on horseback to meet my master at Hampton Court (where he now had apartments of his own). I caught sight of Margaret taking the same road on foot. She had a day's holiday to visit her mother, who was ill. I told her I could not bear to see her trudging in the dust, and I lifted her on to my horse. Then I made the horse trot, so that Margaret would have fallen off, if she had not held me very tightly by the waist. Soon we came to a wood.

"Are you tired?" I said. "Let's rest!"

I led the horse into a clearing, and tied it to a tree. Margaret jumped down into my ready arms.

"Not here!" she whispered. "Oh, not here! The horse is looking."

The same day, I arrived at Hampton Court. It was that evening I met the King in the garden, and kissed his hand, and was weighed in the balance . . .

"It's a difficult thing," my master said next day. "But I believe you can do it. That is, if you're willing." He smiled and I was willing at once, before I knew anything more.

# 3

Then he told me. "You are to go to Buckden, in Huntingdonshire, and see the old Queen—the Dowager Princess. You are to tell her that you come of your own accord. You are devoted to her cause, and you want to enter her service. She'll be doubtful, but . . . Tell as much truth as you can; that's always a good rule. Tell her who your mother was, how poor your father left you . . . Above all, speak Spanish! That's the way to make her believe you. But she's got sharp eyes; she'll watch you to see if you're writing reports to me. You *must* write them, of course: I want to know everything that she says or writes to the Emperor's ambassador. But write only when you're alone, and keep each report safe, with your money, at your belt, until you can put it into the hands of my messenger. And remember my messenger will be in disguise. A beggar or a pedlar—some ragged creature who can speak to you in the open air without arousing suspicion."

"I'll remember, sir. I won't let her find me out."

"Oh, she'll find you out in the end. She's clever. Only put it off as long as you can. And when you *are* found out, remember—you're *my* agent, not the King's. The King has nothing to do with it. Forget that you ever saw him."

My first feeling was pride. I was trusted by my master.

I was trusted by my King. But my next feeling was a pang of sorrow, at being sent away.

"How long must I stay there?" I asked.

"Why, as long as England needs you to be there!" my master said. "My dear boy, do you think I'd agree to part with you, if it weren't for the safety of this country? You are dealing with a very dangerous enemy."

"Who—the old Queen?"

"She may mean to lead a rising."

"But sir, she's a woman."

"My dear Tom, have you never thought that God (for his own good purposes) plays very curious tricks on mankind? Of all those tricks the cruellest was making Katherine of Aragon a woman. What a King she would have been! What a leader! What a fighter! Why, Tom, haven't you heard how she won the Battle of Flodden?"

I had been born in the year of Flodden: that was all I knew. "Wasn't it the King's victory, sir?" I asked.

"How could it be? The King was away fighting his own little war in France. You know, Tom, there's more to a war than riding a great white horse into battle. You have to make sure that your soldiers have something in their bellies. Otherwise they won't be on the battlefield—they'll be in the barns and byres, putting powder matches to the peasants' feet to make them tell where the grain's hidden. When the King had his war in France he thought Wolsey was the cleverest man in the world, because Wolsey saw to it that the food was always where the soldiers were. But the old Queen was doing all that for the troops levied in this country. From the moment she heard the Scots were preparing an attack, she had everyone busy on supplies. Even her court ladies, who were fit for nothing else, were set to sewing banners. What's more, she told her officers how to fight. The poor old Earl of Surrey was the leader in the field; he had a rag-tag of wild north-countrymen. They thought

they knew something about fighting the Scots--they'd been doing it all their lives, losing as often as winning. It was Katherine who taught them tactics, and her tactics won. Even if that battle--Flodden--had been lost, she would still have won, because she was riding north at the head of sixty thousand men. I tell you that woman would have gone charging into battle, just like her mother Isabella did against the Moors!"

My master paused and added soberly: "What must it be like to be a woman? To win a great victory, and make a lasting peace--which is a harder thing to do--and then, in the very midst of triumph, to put your head back under the yoke and say: 'This was all done for you, my lord and husband!' To let all the glory go to someone else. To see the country ruled by blundering, vain-glorious old Wolsey, knowing all the time that you could do it better--and still to be silent, still to be confined to fiddle-faddle with a needle. How *can* she be content?" He looked sharply at me. "Don't imagine that she *is* content, will you, Tom? She knows how to wear a calm face. But . . . we can't prevent her writing to her nephew, the Emperor of Germany. We can't prevent her seeing his ambassador. If we kept her locked up, all Europe would say she was being poisoned. And it's come to this, Tom--she's been promised help from abroad."

"From the Emperor?"

"Who else?"

"But sir, surely he's busy fighting the Turk?"

"How old are you?" asked Mr. Cromwell. "Twenty? Come, come! You should know something about the princes of this world. The Emperor has assembled a great army to fight the Turk. Now, would you really be surprised if you woke up one morning, and heard that he'd made one of his 'everlasting peaces' with the Turk, and was marching this great army towards England?"

"He'd need a great many ships."

"He has a great many ships. He controls the Low Countries; their trading vessels and their harbours. Why shouldn't he invade us? In his place, I would."

"But does the old Queen—does the Dowager Princess—really want his help? Does she mean to lead a rising?"

"My dear Tom!" said Mr. Cromwell. "If I knew that, would I send you to find out?"

The preparations for my journey took some days. I could not go as I was, and pretend to be a ruined squire. My horse was too good. I left it with Mr. Cromwell, and he gave me another, a bay gelding brought him by an unsuccessful petitioner. It was a great clumsy thing, but sound-winded.

My clothes were so fine that I would be known at once as an emissary from the court. I must have new ones that looked old. And yet, to go to a tailor and ask to be made shabby would seem so strange that the story would run from end to end of Cheapside.

I hunted out the doublet and cloak I had worn at my first coming to Mr. Cromwell's house. But I found I could not wear the doublet; good living had made me taller and broader. It had room for alteration in the seams, but who was to do the work?

I told Mr. Cromwell that he could trust my Margaret. He sent for the girl and together we swore her to secrecy. Then he set her to work alone in a little room. It was in the part of the house he had leased from the friary and it had been a friar's cell. He told Margaret to let nobody in there but me.

I thought this cell a most convenient place, and not only for sewing. But when I first came to Margaret there I found the silly girl in tears.

"Where will you go?" she sobbed. "Wherever will you go?"

"Ssh!" I said. "You swore you wouldn't ask me any questions."

"No, no," said Margaret. "I won't ask. I'll say nothing. Only take me with you!"

"I wish I could," I said and kissed her.

"I've been thinking and thinking," Margaret said, "and I don't see how you can even keep alive, if you're alone. Because you're a gentleman; you don't know how to work. You don't even know how to look after your money; you'll be robbed on the highways and cheated in the markets. How can you live while you tramp the roads, looking for a new master?"

I cried out: "What, you silly little goose! Do you think Mr. Cromwell is turning me out?"

"I know I swore not to ask the reason," Margaret went on. "But whatever it was, need he have treated you so meanly? I never would have thought it of Mr. Cromwell. Couldn't he let you keep your handsome clothes, when you've worked for them these two years?"

I tried to set her heart at rest but it was difficult, since I must not tell the truth. And still she ran on. "I know what you gentlefolk think. You think poverty's worse than death. But it won't be so bad! Look, we can sell this necklace you gave me, and this bracelet; and that will keep us in bread a long, long time. And the harvest time is coming; I can earn something in the fields. I'm very strong. And then in the winter, perhaps I can get a place where I can do embroidery, only not living in another man's house, like this; we must have a room of our own. I'll keep your clothes clean and mended, so that you won't seem like a beggar, when you go out looking for a new master."

I could stop her chatter only by kissing and kissing her mouth.

"You stay here!" I said. "Stay where the good food is, and keep your trinkets; I'll be rich enough, when I come back, to buy you something better." (Which was true; Mr. Cromwell had promised to add my full wages, for as

long as I was away, to the hoard I already had at the goldsmith's.)

"But are you sure?" she said. "I thought you must be in trouble. I thought it might be because of...of what happened in that wood."

"Who knows about that, then?" I asked. "Have you been telling tales?"

"Oh no!" Margaret whispered. "But I feel *everybody* must know. I feel so ashamed."

I laughed at that, and began to undo her dress.

"But surely," she protested, "you can't want *that* again. My mother told me if I let a man do *that*, he'd never touch me again."

For all the time I took to prove her mother wrong, Margaret managed to finish the doublet in two days. Then she made the secret pockets, in which I was to keep my stock of paper and my travelling inkhorn. I also needed shirts of homespun linen, not the fine lawn I had been wearing, and she was another three days making those. All this gave me time enough to make her forget her shame. By night she was chastely locked in with the other maids, but by day we devoured each other. Since I thought her passion for me a sign of her good sense, I loved her better than I had loved any girl, and this roused in me a wildness I had not known before. Like most young men I thought myself a perfect master of the art; I knew how to be careful. ("Mind you put your small coal outside the door!" the other girls used to say.) But more than once, in Margaret's arms, I was lost past all reckoning. On our last evening together, I looked into her face and saw the tear-marks there, and felt, for the first time, a little guilty.

"You know," I said, "that I can't tell you where I'm going. I have been trusted not to say. But if you should find yourself in . . . in any desperate need, tell Mr. Cromwell. He knows where I am."

She was afraid of Mr. Cromwell. But I made her promise. Then, hiding her face in my naked shoulder, she said: "Joe Thaxted is in love with me."

"Who?" I asked.

"The carpenter who makes Mr. Cromwell's furniture. He has asked me to marry him," she whispered, still not looking at me.

"But you won't?" I said.

"Oh no!" said Margaret. She looked into my eyes, questioning, reproaching . . .

But what did she want? She must know that *I* could not marry her, being a gentleman born. The most I thought about the future was that, if I married an heiress, we might have Margaret in the house to minister to our comforts.

A few hours later, in the blackness of the short summer night, I parted from my master. We had no grooms to gossip; Mr. Cromwell himself held the lantern for me while I mounted. "God speed!" he whispered. "I hope to get a great packet of news from you soon."

"I shall write once a week, sir," I said. "With God's help."

"For God's sake," said my master, "don't rely on God! Use a little common sense."

# 4

My horse being slow, and I worn out for want of sleep, I got no further, the first day, than Hatfield. But the next day I was myself again, and rode forty miles through the pleasant summer fields.

At St. Neots I stayed in a little inn, where the landlady told me she was lately left a widow. "And not even a child to comfort me!" she said. "Seven years married, and barren as a stone!" I took this as an invitation to go where there was no danger. The woman was young, a little too fat, but not ugly, so why should I refuse?

But in the morning, when the birds woke me, I lay thinking of Margaret, sweet and fresh as any bird. Then I turned and saw beside me a great stupid face, with its mouth wide open. I jumped out of bed so quickly that I woke the widow. "What!" she said. "Are you a frisky devil in the daytime, too?"

When I rode away I was ashamed to find myself bewashed with tears for Margaret, as she had been for me.

On a sunny morning, tears dry fast enough. I passed a cottage where a mother was sitting on a doorstep, with her children round her, eating bread and honey in the sunshine. I smiled, thinking how the Jew Marco would have enjoyed the sight, and they smiled at me. So I stopped

and asked them whether I was on the right road for Buckden Palace.

The mother jumped up, and made me a curtsey. "Sir! Are you going to see the Queen?"

"The Princess Dowager," I said.

"Yes, the *real* Queen. Sir, please wait; I must give you something for her."

Out of her dark, low cottage the woman brought me an earthenware pot with its lid sealed by beeswax. It was so small that it went into my pocket.

"Please tell her, sir, it's my own honey, so I know it's good."

One of the children asked: "Is there some left for us?"

"That's enough of your begrudging!" the mother said. "Don't you think that our poor Queen should have some sweetness in her life?"

I thought this woman might be a little crazed. Had she even told me the right way to Buckden Palace? I asked again at the next cottage, to make sure.

Here a man and his wife both begged me, with tears in their eyes, to take a basket of raspberries to the Queen. "The last of the season," they said. "The last we can give her."

After that I began asking at every house I passed. Soon I was festooned with baskets and boxes and jars. And with every present went a blessing to "the real Queen", and a curse for "that whore Nan Bullen." Some of the loudest curses were for Thomas Cromwell. Of course these were ignorant peasants; they had not the Londoners' understanding of our great national struggle against the Pope. Nevertheless I was taken aback to find them all of one mind.

Since I carried so many presents, I was welcome at Buckden Palace—that is, welcome to the porter's lodge. It was another matter to reach the presence of Katherine. An elderly Spanish lady came out and whispered to me that it was not safe; Thomas Cromwell put people in

prison if they insisted on seeing the Queen. I said I would risk that. Then I told the lady in Spanish that I was the son of the Queen's former lady in waiting, Doña Beatriz.

"My mother," I said, "died repenting that she ever deserted Her Grace."

"Oh, *I* knew Doña Beatriz," the lady said. She burst into tears, and went back into the palace. Not long afterwards she came back and led me through a great hall hung with tapestry, to a garden still more pleasantly adorned. Plums and apricots were growing on the sunlit wall. The old Queen and her ladies sat sewing there as calmly as if they had been resting in the country for their health.

What was she like, this Queen? Only a fat little woman, nearing fifty, with a tired face marked across and across by grief. That was until she smiled. Then, she looked as gracious as if she still had all the favours of a kingdom to dispense. As I sank to my knees I found it not too hard to act the part of a man who respected her. She gave me her hand to kiss, and said: "I knew poor Doña Beatriz was dead. Lady Willoughby told me, and I had a Mass said for her soul. But . . ." she paused, looking at me intently. "Are you really her son?"

I said in Spanish: "It is true; my mother was Doña Beatriz, who married Sir Thomas Vaughan. She often told me how she came to England with Your Grace. She said that when you rode into London to be married you wore a broad round hat, the shape of a cardinal's hat, tied with a lace of gold, which kept it on your head, and under the hat you wore a coif of a carnation colour, and this gold and this carnation did not dim, but made more beautiful, the reddish gold of your own hair."

"Oh yes!" Katherine said. "That is the very voice of Beatriz." I thought she would weep, but she paused and said steadily: "The poor girl talked of nothing else but hats and clothes. Doña Isabel!" She turned to the elderly lady. "Do you think he is like her?"

"He has the eyes of Beatriz," Dona Isabel said. "Those big, dark, soft eyes that melted people's hearts."

I said: "Your Grace, let me make amends. My mother deserted you; let me enter your service."

"Do you know how poor I am?" Katherine asked.

"Not so poor as I am," I said. "My mother—through her own fault, I know—had no dowry, and my father died leaving me nothing but debts. I wish that I were as rich as Your Grace is, in the love of the people." I began to tell her how I had been laden with gifts on my way.

"I know, I know," she said. "Poor souls! Poor, good, innocent souls!"

Now at last I saw the tears come to her eyes, and I thought that she would not be able to refuse me anything. But she said, quite sharply: "I remember! I heard about you, from Lady Willoughby, when I was still allowed to see my friends. She said the son of Beatriz had been left penniless, but surely she also said that you had entered the service of Thomas Cromwell?"

She had caught me, fair and square, and I could not help showing my confusion. Then it flashed into my mind that the more confusion I showed, the better. I thought of my master's advice: "Tell as much truth as you can!"

"Your Grace!" I said. "It's true that poverty drove me to that miserable service. Thank God I am free of it now! Mr. Cromwell said some words insulting to Your Grace; I answered him; and the end of the matter was that I was turned out of doors, with nothing but the clothes I had worn at my coming."

Because it reminded me of Margaret, my false tale made a real tremor in my voice.

"And what," asked Katherine, "were the words that Mr. Cromwell said of me?"

*Tell as much truth as you can.* "He said Your Grace was planning to lead a rebellion against the King."

The ladies twittered in outrage, but Katherine asked quietly: "Do you think he believes that?"

"I think he is . . . very much afraid of it."

"Well!" said Katherine. "I am glad. Not glad that he deceives himself, still less that he deceives the King. But I am glad there is *some* reason for my treatment here. It is not pure wickedness that separates me from my daughter and my friends. It is fear, and such fears can distract the minds of even the greatest kings. As for you—" She gave me the same considering, weighing look that I had had from the King. "As for you, stay if you like. If what you say is true, and you have really lost your place for my sake, I cannot refuse to give you shelter."

I swore she should not regret it. I would serve her to the last . . .

Katherine was no fool. She made me sit by her at table, and taste all her food for poison—a good way to use a spy. I did not believe my master meant to poison her, but I was not so sure of Anne Boleyn—our new Queen Anne. When I thought of the glitter in her black eyes, I could not eat with my accustomed appetite. Besides, the food was plainer than in Mr. Cromwell's house, and we had no bawdy jokes to savour it, so I soon began to grow thin.

The hardest part was finding opportunity to write to Mr. Cromwell. I was never alone. Katherine had one other gentleman secretary, a Spaniard, Don Francisco Felipez, and with him I had to share both room and bed. When we went riding, morning and evening, for our health, we rode together. We worked at the same table, he at one end, writing Katherine's private letters, and I at the other, busy with the formal notes and statements of accounts for her estates. (She still owned great estates, but, that autumn, some of the rents did not reach her, and she was forever short of money). Now and then I would get a glimpse of the letters Don Francisco wrote. I could see that

Katherine was corresponding with the Emperor's ambassador, but I had no chance to find out what she said.

Don Francisco was a very tedious companion. His only remark about everything English was that things were better in Spain.

Nor did I find the servants more entertaining. They seemed as if struck dumb by fear. When they spoke it was to ask me if I could guess when Mr. Cromwell meant to send another emissary. They said they had frequent visitations from his men, who threatened them with all the penalties of treason if they called Katherine the Queen. Katherine's English chaplains, Father Abel and Father Barker, threatened them with all the penalties of Hell if they did not. These priests argued that the servants had sworn loyalty to Katherine as Queen, and that to swear another oath would be perjury.

But it was not this argument that moved the servants. It was Katherine herself. They were more afraid of her than of the King and all his men. And the strangest thing is that *I* was afraid of her. I sweated with fear as I sat in the privy, with my travelling ink-horn and my secret stock of paper, scribbling a few lines to Mr. Cromwell.

In my first letter I told him about my strange journey. "All the curses I heard," I wrote, "were for Her Grace Queen Anne, and you. Nobody said a word against the King."

Then I told him how Katherine had received me. I wrote: "It is possible she knows me for a spy, but keeps me here nevertheless, to prove she has nothing to hide. She would trust me better if, next time you send an emissary here, he were to demand that she dismiss me, as a person displeasing to you."

I folded the letter up small, put it in the purse at my belt, and waited for an opportunity to send it.

Every day, as Don Francisco and I rode through Buckden village for exercise, we were plagued by the beggars, cripples

and idiots of the place. I did not drive them away too roughly, for fear Mr. Cromwell's messenger might be among them.

There was a mad nun, Elizabeth Barton, who used to stand every day outside the gate, asking to see "the real Queen." She used to cry out: "King Herod is doomed, is doomed!" Sometimes it sounded like: "King Harry is doomed." Katherine always refused to see her, and at last she went away.

When I had been at Buckden about a week, a bold gipsy woman seized my bridle. "I see good fortune in your face" she said. "Let me tell it in your ear!" Then she pulled my head down and whispered: "If you have anything for Mr. Cromwell, give it me!"

"Well!" I said, loud enough for Don Francisco to hear. "That's worth a penny." I opened my purse and gave her a coin, and the letter, which instantly vanished into the folds of her cloak. I felt sure Don Francisco had not seen it. He only said that the gipsies were better in Spain.

A tedious fortnight followed. Every day I attended mass in the Queen's chapel, and put on an air of great devotion. The throaty Latin of her Spanish priest, de Athequa, made me sick with memories of childhood. There was not so much as a pretty face to look at; the ladies in waiting were elderly, and even the younger maids plain. Don Francisco seemed never to think of any woman except the Queen. Every night he prayed for her, out loud, and I would not have been surprised to hear him praying *to* her.

When Mr. Cromwell's official emissary came, he was "Thomas Crumvell, thought to be a kinsman", and he played his part well. The little man blew himself up like a frog, to roar and bluster his demand that the Queen should dismiss me. It was all I could do to keep from laughing. In the midst of his tirade he addressed the Queen as "Your Grace." Part of his mission was to persuade her servants not to call her that. But, like them, once he was face to face

with her, he found it impossible to call her anything else.

"If Your Grace knew how ungrateful this young man has been to us!"

*Us*? I no longer wanted to laugh. I realised now that he did not know I was a spy. Mr. Cromwell would not have trusted him with such a secret. He had been told that Mr. Cromwell really wanted me dismissed, and he was doing me all the harm he could. Of course that proved him a loyal servant of Cromwell's, but I did not think about that. I could only think what a nasty little man he was at heart. The slanders came pouring out. "A traitor, a liar, a thief . . ." It was with real indignation that I knelt at Katherine's feet, calling Heaven to witness that I had left Mr. Cromwell's house as poor as I went into it.

She seemed to believe me. Certainly she told "Crumwell", very sharply, that she would not dismiss me unless she were ordered to do so by "the King, my husband." She knew that the King would never send her any direct orders. His policy was to pretend that she did not exist.

Seeing me afterwards weeping real tears (for "Crumwell's" visit had made me feel truly banished) Katherine spoke to me kindly. "Come!" she said. "*I* am not crying. And don't you think that it comes hard to me, to be berated by a vulgar little man? Do you think this is what I have been used to?"

She spoke to me more freely from that time, and I was no longer dogged everywhere by Don Francisco. Sometimes, indeed, he was missing for days at a time, on some secret errand of Katherine's. Then I could ride out by myself, and write a letter in a clearing of the woods, with my back against a tree. I found out where the gipsy woman lived, with her brood, in a sort of covered cart. If I whistled the right tune she would come through the trees, to take my letter.

It became less irksome to me to taste the Queen's food. Now that Mr. Cromwell knew I was doing it, he would see I was not poisoned. So my mind was free to listen to Katherine.

When she was talking to her ladies in Spanish, about the old days, it was not like my mother's talk. She did not say what clothes King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella wore. She was concerned with their wars against the Moors, and their part in the discovery of the New World. Once I ventured to ask: "Did Your Grace ever see Cristobal Colon?"

"Oh yes! When I was seven my parents took me to Barcelona to see him. He paraded through the town and did homage before us, the Admiral and his crew. He brought us wagonloads of treasure, and parrots, and monkeys, and six wild savages with no clothes but feathers, wearing ornaments of solid gold. Oh, I remember that so well! Because these Indians were the only people who did not bow before us. They did not know what a King was."

Trying to picture those brown men in feathers and pure gold, I cried out: "Oh, Your Grace, I wish I had been there!"

Katherine laughed. "You're still a child," she said. "I suppose you would have seen it, as I did, with a child's eyes. In those days it seemed glorious and right, like everything my father and mother did. But now I know that God never lets us, poor sinful creatures, be quite right. There is always evil mixed in what we do. Besides the treasure, Cristobal Colon's men brought back the Indian measles. That was what they called it, at first. When the Indians had it, it was a little illness, like a child's measles—a few spots. When it came to Spain it was turned into a plague, and it spread faster than bad news. The French call it the Spanish disease, and the English call it the French disease, or the pox. Cardinal Wolsey had it; he wore gloves to hide the sores on his hands. That was why I could not bear him to come near me. I could not bear to see him hanging round the King, breathing into his face."

"But," one of the ladies murmured, "His Grace could not, surely, catch it from a breath?"

"No," said Katherine firmly. "The King did not catch it."

In September, 1533, came the moment I had been waiting for—the visit of the Emperor's ambassador, Eustache Chapuys.

The whole household came out to greet him at the gate. He was a splendid figure in crimson on his white horse, though stiff and stumbling when he came to dismount. After him came a train of servants, including a jester and a juggler and a tumbler, who were to entertain us after dinner.

While dinner was made ready, Katherine took the ambassador into the walled garden. I brought him a cup of wine. There was nobody else in attendance but the Spanish ladies, and Don Francisco. All the talk was in Spanish, for Chapuys, though he had been four years in England, could not speak our tongue.

Katherine would not let him kneel before her. "I know how it hurts your joints," she said. "We rheumatic old people must look after each other." Then she made him sit beside her, patting his hand and calling him: "Dear old friend."

"I am glad," he said, "to see Your Grace looking so much better."

"Yes, I have been better since I came here," said Katherine. "The summer has been wonderfully warm—almost like Spain. There are days when I have no pain at all."

For all my watching, I had never seen a sign that she felt any bodily pain. If she could conceal so much, what else might she be hiding?

Chapuys asked her to send her attendants away.

"If I see you alone," she said, "they will say I am plotting. God knows, I have nothing to hide. No; if you have any news, tell it me now."

Chapuys told his news. "The Lady has been delivered of a girl, to be christened Elizabeth."

"A girl, after all!" said Katherine calmly. "They were all so sure that it would be a son! What other news?"

"You know that the King's sister, the Duchess of Suffolk, died less than three months ago? Now the Duke has married

his ward, the girl intended for his son—the daughter of your old friend Lady Willoughby."

"Poor little Kate Willoughby!" Katherine said. "To have a husband thirty years older . . . And yet it is a good protection for the girl. I was afraid she might suffer for her mother's friendship to me."

"They say there is quarrelling between the King and the Lady," Chapuys continued. "While she was in childbed she accused him of making love to her ladies, and he said: 'Learn to close your eyes, as your betters did before you.'

"Your betters!" exclaimed Katherine. I thought that must please her, but she shook her head and murmured: "Oh, poor woman!"

Chapuys asked in amazement: "Are you sorry for her?"

"Before long," said Katherine, "you will all be sorry for her, and with good reason." Then she broke out abruptly: "Are you keeping something from me? Why have you said nothing about my daughter? Did they really make her go to Greenwich for the birth?"

"No. It was threatened, but they decided against it. The Lady does not want to see Princess Mary at court; she looks too beautiful and arouses too much sympathy."

"But where is Mary?"

"Still in her own house at Beaulieu."

"Are you sure? Is she well? Have they done her any harm?"

"No; they are waiting to see whether this new child will live. But this is the moment . . ." He began to speak in French, too fast for me to follow.

Katherine understood him, but answered in Spanish. "Are you mad? With spies all round her?"

"When she rides out hunting, she can shake off the spies." Chapuys went into another torrent of French, from which I could distinguish only the words: "Her other manor, at Barking." And: "The River Thames."

"The King would send his own ships against you," said Katherine. "A battle at sea—do you know what that's like? If she escaped the cannonade, she might be drowned."

"Not in my ship," said Chapuys. "It's better and faster than anything the English can build. She'd be in Antwerp the same day."

Katherine shook her head, but he persisted: "What will happen to the Princess if she stays here? Have you thought of that?"

"I think of it," said Katherine, "night and day. I thought of it most when she was told she must go to the christening, and I wrote to her then, to prepare her. But I do not believe that my husband will kill his own child. You think so, because you haven't lived with him. You don't know how good he is at heart."

"But the Lady?" said Chapuys. "What might *she* do?"

"Poor creature!" Katherine said. "It is possible that in her anguish at not having a son, she might tryto poison Mary. But then, at the worst, Mary will die an innocent martyr. She will not incur the sin of rebelling against her father."

"The Pope would easily absolve her from that sin," said Chapuys, "if what she did was done to save the Church in England. But if Your Grace has a scruple, then the Princess need play no part at all in the actual fighting. She could be safe in the Emperor's keeping. She could be married . . . What do you say to her cousin, Reginald Pole?"

"I have so often dreamed of that," said Katherine. "And then for a time I feared it, because he was hired by the King. You know the King sent him to bribe the University of Paris? But after that he came to beg my forgiveness. He said he had been misled because he loved the King. Why not? *I* love the King. Whatever Reginald Pole does is done from the heart. When he went into exile for my sake, I felt as if a son had left me."

"Your Grace does right to love him," said Chapyus.

"He is heart and soul behind the Emperor's proposal."

"Does he really want a war?" asked Katherine. Her face was calm, but her fingers were clutching the crucifix at her throat.

"Should we call it rather a universal rising of the English people against heresy? It *would* be universal; the common people are with you heart and soul. If once Your Grace were to ride out and raise your standard, armed men would spring like dragon's teeth out of the ground."

Katherine only shook her hand. Her fingers were so tight upon the crucifix, I thought they would break it apart. Chapuys went on: "The English noblemen send me messages every day. If they dare not put their wishes into words they send me tokens—a medal bearing the arms of the Pole family, or a device of marigolds and pansies intertwined, to show how they desire this marriage for the Princess."

"But while they send these marigolds and pansies," Katherine said, "they rely on the Emperor to send soldiers. That means war."

"But a holy war, against heresy! Your Grace, consider—heresy kills the soul."

"It does indeed," said Katherine. "I am plagued with messengers from Thomas Cromwell, and I can see by their eyes that the soul is dead within them."

"And it spreads!" declared Chapuys. "It spreads by example. If this goes on how many souls can be saved?"

"All those," Katherine said, "who do not consent to their own ruin. God gives us free will; no human power can take that away. We can choose to keep the old faith in our hearts, and then God will give us the strength to bear martyrdom. And even those who have not the strength of the martyrs, even those who betray both God and their kinsfolk—still, if they repent, they will find forgiveness, and be saved."

"But this is a whole nation!" Chapuys said. "Soon the Pope will have to put all England under an interdict.

Children will be born who cannot be truly baptised. They will grow up and never hear the true faith preached. How *can* their souls be saved?"

"I believe my daughter will save them. But in God's good time! We cannot force God's hand by the sin of starting a war."

"Your Grace, I believe—and Reginald Pole agrees—that war is a lesser evil than heresy, because war kills only the body, not the soul."

Katherine said: "You and Reginald Pole have little experience of war."

Chapuys looked as if she had doubted his manhood. "Your Majesty, when I was younger, I adventured my life in the Emperor's service."

"Did you see the Sack of Rome?"

"No, but . . . Your Grace, that was not the Emperor's doing. The troops got out of hand. I am afraid that many of them were German Lutherans."

"And if he made war on England, could he do it without Lutheran troops? Suppose they desecrate and rob the churches here, as they did in Rome? Would that still be a holy war?"

"The Emperor might well prefer to use troops from Spain. All Spaniards feel a personal devotion to you, as the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella."

"It is true," Katherine said. "My countrymen remember me. I have heard so . . ." Her voice wavered a little, but she went on firmly: "My countrymen were at the sack of Rome."

"Perhaps a few."

"They were as cruel as the Lutherans, in robbing churches and murdering the priests. They might have murdered the Pope—my countrymen—if he had not been smuggled out to Orvieto. And, my dear Chapuys, when I heard this of the Spaniards, I was not at all surprised. It is only what I have seen, since I was a little girl. I was with my parents when

they rode in triumph through Granada. I saw what our men did to the Moorish prisoners, yes, and to the Moorish women and children."

"But because of that war, Spain is Christian today."

"And because of that war, Spanish Christians have grown more cruel than the pagans they fought. My mother was a good woman, gentle and kind to me. But the Pope himself rebuked her for her cruelty to the Jews. My father was a good man; before he fought he prayed. And yet, when the King of England wrote to him, asking for me as a bride for his eldest son, do you know what my father answered?"

Chapuys said: "There is no need to dwell on the past."

"The past is with me now," said Katherine. "So long as I lived in splendour I could forget it. Or I could persuade myself that I had atoned."

"But why should you atone? If there was any wrong done, it was not by you."

"The sins of the fathers are visited on the children. Not because God is unjust, but because he means us to learn from that sin. If we feel how much we have suffered by it, we will be careful not to visit such a sin on the heads of our own children." Her fingers, now no longer writhed upon the crucifix, but they held it firmly. "Believe me, my dear Chapuys, this lonely place is a good place for thinking, and I have thought. And every day I feel more certain that, if my father had not spent his life in war, he could not have done such a terrible thing."

"Whatever he did," said Chapuys, "was because he loved you. He was concerned for your safety."

"God knows he was. And God knows I am concerned for the safety of my daughter. But I *have* learned. I know I must not use a wicked means to save her life."

"Your Grace is too scrupulous."

"I am scrupulous," Katherine agreed. The autumn sunshine slanted across her tired face. She seemed to be

summoning up the last of her strength to say: "The war you talk of lightly has been fought within my breast. So I am scrupulous. I wish my father had been. And my husband's father. Then they would never have agreed upon a crime, and made my marriage in blood."

In the report I wrote next day to Mr. Cromwell, I could not explain that last part. But I put it in, hoping that he would understand it.

I added (lest he should think me too easily taken in) that I was well aware a woman's "no" might be taken to mean "yes". Indeed, the whole scene might have been a comedy presented for my benefit.

But I did not really think so. I had seen Katherine's fingers writhe and stiffen, when Chapuys told her how she could surround herself with armed men. I believed that she was fighting a great temptation.

In the ensuing weeks it seemed as if, in rejecting this temptation, she had rejected active life. More and more of her time was spent in her bedroom, or in the little chapel where she prayed.

As the autumn grew colder, I began to see what I had not thought of in summer—that Buckden Palace was built far too near the Great Fens. The October fogs began to drift our way, and with the fogs came the ague.

We all caught it, but I felt it only as a little flushing and shivering. I was hardened to it from a child, because my father's house was near Market Deeping, on the very edge of the fens. But if I did not shiver much with fever, I shivered at the damp of the Palace walls. This was not a royal palace; it belonged to the Bishop of Lincoln; and it had many strange and incommodious devices. Because the Bishop had been much troubled with petitioners, he had a great oak door, as heavy and hard to move as the door of a fortress, between his private apartments and his dining hall. In the wall beside this door was a hole, set slantwise in the

masonry, like the leper squint in the wall of a church. So, when anyone knocked at the door, the bishop or his servant could peep through the hole to see who was knocking.

The dining hall was so cold that the draught, which came into the private apartments through this hole, blew almost as bitterly as if it had been coming from the outside air. Katherine had it stuffed with straw, but for all that, for all the fires lit in the dining hall, for all the tapestries and hangings on the walls, she never could get warm. She kept me busy writing letters asking that she should be allowed to move to a drier place. She could no longer hide her pain; at every step she took she was fighting the enemy in her joints.

And yet she did not lose her self-command, until one foggy November day when she asked for Don Francisco, and I told her that he was too sick to leave his bed. Then she cried out like a wounded beast. She went at once, stiff as she was, to his bedside. He swore he would get up if she needed him, but she saw his rheumy eyes, and heard the wheezing in his chest, and ordered him to stay in bed. They whispered together for a time. Then Katherine turned to me.

"I'm afraid I have to send you on a long, tedious journey," she said.

"As Your Grace wishes," I murmured. My eyes filled with tears—tears of pure happiness, at the thought of riding somewhere outside this dreary place.

"What a lad you are for weeping!" Katherine said. "Those great swimming eyes . . . You look at me just as your mother did. But I shall have to send you, all the same. There is nobody else who speaks both Spanish and English."

Then she told me to go to Beaulieu, in Essex, to see her daughter Mary. "Chapuys writes to say that she is ill. But he has been forbidden to visit her, and this is something new. Till now she has been allowed to see anyone, so long as they did not bring her letters from me. When I send

Don Francisco, he knows how to deliver a letter, but . . ." She stopped to think. "No! I will send you, but I will not give you a letter, in case you are taken. There is no need; she'll know you are my messenger, if you speak to her in Spanish, because that's the sign between us. Tell her three things. First, that I send my blessing. Second, I want to know the symptoms of her illness. Third, for the present she must not think of any husband—not even Reginald Pole."

I repeated the message, to show I had got it by heart.

"Now," she said, "as to how you can enter the house . . ."

She looked at me doubtfully, and sighed.

"I'm younger than Don Francisco," I said. "Better at hiding among trees, and climbing walls."

"That won't help you," said Katherine. "There isn't a house in England more impossible to enter without being seen. It stands in a perfect flatness; there isn't a tree or a hedge for more than a mile in any direction. The stream which brings water to the house has a few reeds and bushes; they might give you cover in the summer, but not now. No; you will have to do as Don Francisco does. Only swear on the sacrament that you will not repeat this."

I swore, and she told me. "You must leave your horse in Chelmsford, at the King's Arms, before six in the morning. Then go to Arthur Bowers the wood merchant, who lives next door to the inn. He takes a cartload of faggots to the house every morning, and you must hide in the cart. When he reaches the house he will unload the cart, and help you to hide among the faggots. You must wait there, in the kitchen courtyard—wait all day long if need be—until you see a maidservant with one eye, or a manservant with red hair. They are the only ones to be trusted to bring you to the Princess. At the worst, they can give you news of her." Katherine's voice, already low, sank to a whisper. "I must know if she is being poisoned."

I ordered my horse to be saddled, and my clean shirts to

be put in my saddle bag. But, before I could leave, Katherine sent for me again. "There is something else I must find out," she said. "If my daughter is in danger, then so is her governess, my dearest friend Lady Salisbury. Oh God! This weighs heavy on my conscience."

I must have looked as puzzled as I felt. "You understand?" said Katherine. "You know what misfortunes I have brought on Lady Salisbury? Your mother surely must have told you."

I replied that my mother had told me nothing, except what clothes people wore.

"I have so little time!" said Katherine. "And yet I cannot send you, unless you know. At least you know who Lady Salisbury is?"

"The mother of Reginald Pole."

"And of two other sons, who keep their places at court. But do you know who her father was?"

I could remember only that she had some royal blood.

"She was the daughter of the Duke of Clarence. At least you've heard of him?"

"Wasn't there a Duke of Clarence, long ago, drowned in a butt of malmsey?"

"That's what they say. Certainly he died in the Tower, in the time of his brother Edward the Fourth. He left two children—babies—a boy and a girl. The boy was a half-wit, what the country people here call 'an innocent'. But the girl, Margaret Plantagenet, was a most perfect princess. Or she would have been a princess, if the House of York had continued on the throne. When Henry Tudor won his great battle, and became Henry the Seventh, he did not at once destroy the House of York. Indeed, he married one of them—Elizabeth, daughter of Edward the Fourth. He put the son of Clarence in the Tower, but not in the worst part; and the poor half-wit had his accustomed servants round him, so he thought it all the same. Then the King

made Margaret Plantagenet marry a favourite of his own, Sir Richard Pole. The match was beneath her; still, she was not unhappy. It was only because my father—" She crossed herself. "God pardon him! My father, King Ferdinand, said he would let me go to England and marry Prince Arthur, if he believed that Henry the Seventh was truly secure on his throne. But how could he be secure, so long as the Yorkist heir, the son of Clarence, was alive? To get me and my dowry, Henry the Seventh took this poor innocent—innocent indeed—and cut off his head. So my marriage was made in blood. I did not know. I swear I did not know, till I reached England. Then I met Margaret Plantagenet, the sister of the murdered innocent. I could see in her eyes that she hated me, and I could not understand why. When I found out I went to her and begged her forgiveness. And then at last we understood each other. In my seven years' widowhood, she was the only English friend I had. When I had the power—that is, when I married the King—I persuaded my husband to make restitution for his father's crime. Oh, but it was easy to persuade him then! He was so good, so generous; his greatest pleasure was in making people happy. He raised Margaret Plantagenet up to be Countess of Salisbury; he made her eldest son Lord Montague, her youngest son a knight; and her middle son, Reginald Pole, he sent to study abroad. When our daughter Mary was born Lady Salisbury became her governess. She is with her still; I hope she is with her still; so long as they are together, Mary cannot be poisoned. But I am afraid, because of that innocent blood."

"Your Grace!" I protested. "*You* did not shed it."

"It was shed for me," said Katherine. "And I have suffered for it. The death of Prince Arthur, the death of all my sons, this terrible estrangement from the King... All this may not have been enough. I am afraid there is more expiation still to come."

# 5

While Katherine spoke I seemed to see a sort of sense in her theology. But when I rode out into the misty sunshine, and saw the woods lay down their last leaves at my horse's feet, I thought it all a dream. There was no such revengeful Spanish God. The God of England must be a God of little obstacles, of little everyday pitfalls put in the way of plodding mankind.

Plashing and splashing through November mud, I came into St. Neots. As I passed by the little inn where I had stayed, I looked the other way.

But the widow saw me. She was shaking a besom out of her door, and she called out: "Hey, Mr. Vaughan! Stop a minute!"

She came to my horse's head, waving and smiling. Her face looked prettier now, or I was more hungry. "I've heard such tales of you!" she said. "Why didn't you tell me that you were a friend of the Queen? I'd have given you something."

"What—more than you did give?" I whispered.

She laughed, in a happy, shameless way, and asked me in 'for a drink'. I would have accepted, but I was afraid that someone would see me, and tell Katherine that I had been dawdling on my way. So I said I would be back in a few days.

"I'll be looking out for you," she said.

Then she directed me on my way to Cambridge. "Straight on, past the gibbet."

Certainly the gibbet was the only landmark, for those flat sodden miles. It stood on a little rise, in the wind, waving its tattered skeletons. A couple of bodies were too fresh to move so lightly; I caught the scent as I passed. This made me feel more safe; with such a warning before them, highway robbers would not, surely, come by daylight. They might, though, in the dark. As my horse picked his feet, slowly and more slowly, out of the clinging mud, I thought I should be benighted in some place without an inn.

But the twilight lasted me into Cambridge, and Cambridge has wonderful inns. Katherine had been able to give me only a few crowns for my journey. I could not afford to have supper brought me in my room; I sat at the common [illegible]

What's better, though, than common English food? Now freed from all thought of poison, I seized on thick slices of wheaten bread, and beef dripping with fatness, and a leg of tender capon, and good ale. At the head of the table our fat host and hostess were eating away to give us the example. Every time I looked at their buttery faces, gleaming in the candlelight, I felt that I was back among my own people.

Somebody asked about the news from London.

"That nun's caught it, then!" one man said. "Serve her right!"

"What—Elizabeth Barton, the prophetess?"

"Prophetess! One day she said: 'The King won't live a month after his new marriage.' Then, when he did, she changed it. 'The King won't live six months.' "

"All the same, these nuns. Bad as the monks."

"They say old Cromwell sent for the Lord Mayor and all the big merchants of London. Told them they had to

speak up at their dinner tables, tell their servants that the Pope can't touch us here; he's only the Bishop of Rome."

"Cromwell told them to speak up *where*?"

"At mealtimes. When they've got the household together."

"That's just like Cromwell. Telling people what to say in their own houses."

"In *this* house we don't talk; we eat!" said the host.

And the hostess cried out: "Eat and say nothing; that's the way!"

I looked at their faces. Their fat features had grown hard; their eyes narrowed with fear.

After supper a party of students came in. They all seemed younger than myself, but they could hold more ale, and they knew more songs.

"All you that in your beds do lie
Turn to your wives and occupy
And when that you have done your best
Turn arse to arse, and take your rest."

They sang with subtile harmonics, to holy tunes, because most of them were going to be priests.

The maid who carried the candle to show me upstairs was (by that faint light) nearly as pretty as my Margaret. I kissed her and invited her to bed, and she said that she would come for half a crown.

That put me right off. My pride would never let me pay a woman. I reckoned that *she* ought to be grateful to me. Besides, I was dead tired, and, as the saying goes, more fit for a soft bed than a hard harlot.

The next day I went bumping along the rutted ways to Saffron Walden. Here the country changes; the woods lie pleasantly about the fertile hills. I came to a village with a church so beautiful that I thought of stopping and praying there. (As one should, on a tricky journey, in case God is looking.) But before I had quite reached the church I had to rein back, to avoid a great lumbering cart coming out of a

farmyard. The carter, seeing that I was a gentleman, took off his cap and begged my pardon, in the thick slow accent of those parts. I asked him the name of the village and he told me: "Thaxted."

The word made a faint pain in my memory. I could not think why, at first, but then I remembered. Joe Thaxted was the carpenter who loved my Margaret. Like most of the common people, he probably took his name from his village, if not from his master or his trade. So I might find him here . . . The ground being drier, I quickened my horse to a trot.

At Dunmow I was brought to a halt by drenching rain, and so forced, once again, to break this journey which in summer might have been accomplished in a single day. The inn there was little more than a common alehouse, with nothing to eat but bread and cheese, and not one pretty woman in sight.

I had to rise at three, to be sure of reaching Chelmsford before six. I found the King's Arms, and Arthur Bowers the wood merchant, a silent man. When I offered him money he spat and shook his head. Then he jerked his head at the cart, and held a lantern for me while I climbed in. He packed me round with hay, so that the faggots would not hurt me.

They did hurt, nevertheless, when the cart began to move. Even the boards of the cart hurt, as the ruts made them bounce up and down. After I had been jolted from below and bumped from above for what seemed like an eternity—a journey of two or three miles—the cart made a sudden lurch to the left, bruising my side in a new place entirely. I groaned aloud, but the hay must have muffled my voice, for I heard some sentry saying cheerfully to Arthur Bowers: "Pass, friend." I thanked God my journey was over.

It was not. Katherine was right; this was a hard house to get into. For fully a mile the cart lurched and swayed

along ruts worse than before—for we had been on the high road, and were now on the private road of the palace.

I heard more voices, and at last we came to the comfort of cobblestones. The cart stopped. As the faggots were unloaded I saw chinks of light appear, and caught my breath as I understood that it was already day. Surely I should be seen?

I lay huddled in the hay, feeling a thin rain drizzle through, until Arthur Bowers roughly caught my hand, and pulled me into a shed, or rather into a place where a thatched roof, raised on poles, covered one corner of the kitchen courtyard. The roof protected the faggots, and me, from the rain, and on two sides the courtyard walls were a protection from the wind, but two sides were open. While I crouched down in the corner Arthur Bowers, working as calmly as if there were no rain, piled faggots round me. He did it with great skill; he even left an opening so that I could look through. When he had finished he said his first words: "Tomorrow, same time, same place." Then he crossed himself and bowed—but not to me. I thought there must be some holy statue, in a part of the courtyard I could not see.

When he had gone I sat among the faggots, pulling the hay out of my clothes, and watching the servants as they came and went. Sometimes they took faggots from the pile in front of my nose, but still they did not seem to see me.

It was very cold. I felt this as a comfort, at first, for I was close to the midden and the servants' privy, which in summer would have stunk. Slowly I became aware that they *did* stink. The damp, sour smell got inside my throat, as the cold got inside my bones. I was all the colder for being hungry. And though I watched and watched I could not see a red-haired man, or a woman with one eye.

There were other smells now—smells of cooking. I could hardly bear it when a big stout fellow came out of the

kitchen, bringing with him a great gust of the warm food smell, and threw bones with good red meat on them to the dogs. As the dogs came snapping round the bones, the man raised his hand to wipe the sweat off his brow, and pushed his cap aside. Then I saw that he had red hair.

I whistled. Through the noise of the dogs, he did not hear me, and he turned to go inside. I threw a faggot at him, and at last he turned, to see me beckoning.

I have never seen a man more frightened. Indeed for a moment I thought he was going to run back into the house. He seemed to struggle with himself; then he came near me, and whispered: "Wait till dark."

"Find me something to eat!" I whispered back, but he was already gone.

Through all the cold and hungry hours that followed I was thinking how foolish I should look if I were arrested for skulking here. If one of the Princess's own servants found me, I could say I was there for her sake. If it were a servant loyal to the King, I could say that I was doing this for Thomas Cromwell. But I had better give no explanations at all, for fear of giving them to the wrong person.

As the dusk was falling, more and more servants came to fetch faggots from the pile. Fearing to be seen, I crouched low in the corner, and soon I had, besides my other miseries, pins and needles.

At last, when it was quite dark, about five in the afternoon, I felt a hand groping for my hand, and a voice whispering: "This way!"

The manservant drew me into a dark place, and up a dark stairway, and at last into a room with candles and a fire. A lady of about sixty took my hand, and whispered to the manservant to wait outside. I could not see anyone else in the room. But there was a four-poster bed, with its curtains drawn, and I saw one of the curtains stir a little. Then a young, hard voice said: "Where is the other gentleman?"

I kneeled down near the curtains and said in Spanish: "Your Highness, Don Francisco was too ill to leave his bed."

The voice asked: "Have you anything to show that you come from the Queen?"

I explained, still in Spanish, that the Queen had not dared to send a letter, or even a token that would be known as hers. "My only sign to Your Highness is that I speak the Queen's tongue."

As I said this, I felt myself sway, and my eyes were filled with blackness.

I came to lying on the floor. The old lady was crying out: "He is as cold as a corpse!" Then the manservant came in and helped me to a chair. I begged their pardon for troubling them, and explained how long I had been without fire or food. The manservant was instantly sent to fetch me hot soup.

Even the cleverest women may be deceived by their own compassion. There is no reason why a spy should not weep. There is no reason why a spy should not faint. And yet, just as my tears had made Katherine trust me, so my swoon overcame all her daughter's well-founded suspicion.

I have heard many people say of Mary Tudor that there never was a woman who showed more kindness, to anyone whose pain she could actually see. Certainly she now wrapped herself in a robe, and got out of her sickbed, to rub my frozen hands.

Even when I had eaten, and felt quite well again, she would not let me kneel to her. On the contrary, she kneeled to me, when I delivered her mother's blessing. Then we all three sat round the fire, and talked like old friends.

Mary was like her mother—far more like than a young girl should be. At seventeen a face ought not to be so careworn, or so pinched with illness. But she insisted that her trouble was only an ague, and that I was to tell her mother she was almost recovered.

Before I could deliver the last part of my message, she was overwhelming me with questions about her mother's health. Both ladies were delighted to hear that I tasted Katherine's food.

"That's what I do for the Princess," the old lady said. She, as I had guessed, was Lady Salisbury. I said: "The Queen told me that the Princess could not be poisoned, so long as you were with her."

"That is why they mean to separate us" Mary said.

Lady Salisbury cried out: "If they do that, they will have to do it by force. I have already written to Cromwell to tell him that wherever you go, I follow. At my own expense, with my own servants."

"They will not let you follow," Mary said.

All this was news to me. "Are they sending Your Highness away?" I asked. "But where?"

"I am to be lady in waiting to my new sister," said Mary, and like her mother she said it quietly. "They are breaking up my household here. All my servants—a hundred and sixty people—are to be turned out of doors. I have to live with *her* servants, in the nursery palace at Hatfield. They will try to make me call my sister Princess. But I shall not be poisoned. You may tell my mother that I shall eat nothing, except what I see others eat before me."

"But I have a right to be there!" said Lady Salisbury. "Haven't they trusted me to bring you up so far? And now they dare to tell me that I'm an evil influence!"

The old woman's face was carved as deep as marble, with lines of righteousness. I should not have known her by her sons. There was not a trace of Reginald Pole's dreamy look. Sir Geoffrey Pole and Lord Montague, whom I had seen often at court, looked proud - but soft, soft, soft compared with her.

"You know what put Cromwell against me?" she went on. "He might have let me follow the Princess if he had

not known about the marigolds and pansies."

I asked: "Marigolds and pansies?" with a look of inno-

"Oh, a silly fashion," Lady Salisbury said. "It was all nonsense."

"Even if Cromwell knows," Mary said, "how can he think it your fault? Everybody knows that you want Reginald to be a priest. It was only a thought my mother had, long ago, that I might marry him."

She spoke so calmly, and so much unlike a young girl speaking of her marriage, that I watched her face very closely when I delivered the third part of my message.

"Her Majesty says that for the present you should not think of any husband, even Reginald Pole."

"Then she has heard the rumours too!" said Lady Salisbury.

"And no doubt my mother knows," Mary said, "that I have been offered the French king's son for a husband, on condition I obey *them*, and take the oath."

Still, as she spoke of marriage, her face did not alter. But I thought I would try her a little further, and said: "Your Highness, forgive me if I go beyond my instructions. But I believe I know what was in the Queen's mind. She does not wish you to trust completely even in your cousin, the Emperor."

"I never put my trust in any mortal man," said Mary. "The Emperor is the best friend we have on earth, but I do not believe he will do as much for us as Monsieur Chapuys thinks. No! I put my trust in God. He will not let me listen to the threats and promises of men."

I thought of a way to break down her composure. I said, very gently: "Her Grace said nothing about your obedience to the King, your father."

"She knows there is no need," said Mary, and now at last I saw her begin to tremble. "I have always obeyed my

father. I love him. He has never spoken one unkind word to me. All the cruelty I've had is from that woman who's bewitched him. When he comes to himself he'll be grateful to me, as a man recovering from fever is grateful to his doctors. He'll be glad I stood so firm—I know he will. He'll be glad that I refused to take the oath. It is for *his* sake that I shall never swear I am a bastard, or that my mother is not Queen."

Lady Salisbury put her hand on Mary's brow. "You are too hot!" she said firmly. "Back to bed! Why, child! Monsieur Chapuys has told you, again and again, that if they make you take the oath by force it will not count."

"It will not count as binding me," said Mary. "But it will count as an example to the people, and this is what Cromwell wants. Please—" she was about to get into bed, but she turned back to face me "—please tell my mother that I shall never do it. Tell her I am her loving, faithful daughter, and shall be always, always, till I die!"

I slept that night in a little room, no bigger than a cupboard, where Lady Salisbury hid me. She woke me in the morning, long before light, and with her own hands brought me a hot posset. When I thanked her I said I had never before been waited on by a King's niece. The old lady laughed.

"What good has that ever done me?" she said. "Niece to King Edward the Fourth! God help us all! That's why the Queen and I understand each other; we both know what it means to be born a princess, to have no mastery over your own fate."

I said piously: "There's mastery in finding the strength to bear your fate."

"Does God mean us to bear it?" asked Lady Salisbury. "Or to fight against it? Do you know, when they took my brother out to execution, and tied the scarf around his eyes, he laughed. He thought it was a game of blind man's buff.

They say he laid his head down on the block, where even a poor silly lamb would have struggled against his butchers. I would have struggled! Why should we make it easy for our executioners? God forbid the Queen should make it easy for her enemies!" Then suddenly she asked: "This business of the marigolds and pansies–had you not heard of that?"

I asked: "What marigolds? What pansies?"

"Oh, it's only a device that foolish people are sending one another, to show that they want my son Reginald to marry the Princess. If the Queen should ask you, tell her I knew nothing, nothing at all, until I was warned by Doña Maria–by Lady Willoughby. It's all nonsense; Reginald means to be a priest. But what puzzles me is–how did Cromwell know?"

"Are you sure Cromwell knows?"

"Oh yes! Those dreadful little men he sends to do his errands–they've been reproaching me with it. That's why I'm to be separated from the Princess. But how *could* Cromwell know? Have noblemen and ladies begun to spy on one another, to please that upstart?"

"Some servant . . ."

"But people are so careful nowadays, in front of servants! We all know Cromwell bribes them. Oh, I suppose that someone trusted the wrong person. Nowadays who is there to trust? . . . Is it growing light?"

"Not for another hour," I said.

"There is another thing Her Grace the Queen should know," said Lady Salisbury. "The Princess, who, God knows, is a perfect virgin, has not followed the custom of women these three months past."

That startled me. "Witchcraft!" I whispered.

"How ignorant men are!" Lady Salisbury said. "There is nothing more common. It may happen to any servant girl who works beyond her strength. But in a lady, who

does not work, it means that she is worn out by some great unhappiness. I am afraid unhappiness may kill the Princess, if Anne Boleyn does not."

She was interrupted by a call from the next room. When I had dressed myself, she came back and said: "The Princess wishes to take her leave of you."

She led me to the great bed, beside which I knelt. The little sharp, worn face appeared between the curtains.

"Tell my mother," said Mary, "that her messages have made me sleep well at last. I have no fever now. Feel!" She took my hand and pressed it against her brow. I murmured that I was honoured by her touch. She said impatiently: "Yes, yes, but tell my mother I am better. Don't forget!"

At the top of the stairs Lady Salisbury whispered to me that the other matter too was now in order.

The red-haired man guided me down the back staircase, without a lantern. I had only the feel of the damp wall, and his damp hand—for, on that cold morning, he was sweating. He panted besides, like a thirsty dog. He led me through the dark doorway, and back to the place where I could hide among the faggots.

There was not a streak of dawn yet, but there was a moon, and by this moon I saw Arthur Bowers drive his cart in. He got down, crossed himself and bowed. There was, as I could see now, no statue in that yard. He was bowing to the dwelling of the Princess, as if she were a saint.

To get myself on to the cart was a tricky business, for Arthur Bowers had first to unload his faggots, so as to hide me and yet leave me a space to crawl out. He did all this quickly, in utter silence. Then he grasped my hand, helped me on to the cart, and instantly covered me with sacks. As the cart began to move, a maid came out of the kitchen, and offered him a drink. He grunted something which might have been: "No time now—going to fetch a bit of hay." And sure enough we stopped by a barn, where

Arthur, by some long-standing custom, helped himself to hay.

Travelling under hay is better than under faggots, but still I was half-stifled, longing to wriggle and sneeze. When we came back to his wood yard, Arthur helped me to take the hay out of my clothes, but he still did not utter a word. He was a head shorter than myself, so I never got a proper sight of his face. All I remember of this man is that, even in November, he wore his shirt open at the throat, so I could see the crucifix he wore. It was poor one; some village carpenter had made it from a left-over piece of wood. But the figure of Christ was carved with a sort of barbarous force. When the light from the lantern caught it, the body seemed to writhe in agony.

Once more Arthur refused my money, and, when I thanked him, he did no more than grunt. Yet when we parted he bowed to me, very low, as he had bowed before his imagined saint.

That night I reached Cambridge, where I had no time to join the students in their songs. I was too busy writing to Mr. Cromwell. When I had written everything Mary said, and Lady Salisbury, I added: "I believe Mary is not to be moved by any offer of a husband."

Then I wondered should I explain why I thought so? I decided not to, for fear Mr. Cromwell might think me vainglorious.

The truth is, I am a handsome fellow. Most women, when they come near me, acknowledge that, if only by a modest lowering of the lashes. Even old Lady Salisbury had glanced at me with a remembering half-smile. But Mary, when she rubbed my frozen hands, or made me feel her brow, might have been dealing with another woman. Accustomed from her childhood to hear talk of her own marriage, she had never once desired a man.

On my way back I made better speed, and I could have

reached Buckden by the second night. But I stopped at St. Neots. I needed something to give me courage, before I could face the old Queen. I needed wine, and what gives more courage than wine—the voice of a woman, whispering in my ear: "Oh, there never, never, never was a man as good as you!"

In the morning the widow made me take a leather bottle of ale she herself had brewed. "It's all I have to give the Queen" she said. "Poor woman!" And a tear rolled down her fat cheek. "All I can do is pray for her to have her rights."

"Before you do any praying," I said (as I pinched her arse) "you'll have to go to confession."

"What!" she said. "To our stinking old parish priest? I don't confess *that* sin; he'd make me do my penance in his bed. Besides . . ." She rubbed herself as comfortably as a cat, against my body. "Besides, you'll never make me believe it *is* a sin. What did God give it you for, if he didn't want you to use it?"

This was England—my own laughing, careless country. I wished I need not return to Spain, that little Spain the old Queen made about her, where one sin could blast a life, and set its mark on the life still to come.

# 6

Katherine met my bad news with bad news of her own. As Mary had been ordered to move, so had she. She was willing enough to leave Buckden, which was now islanded in mud, so that carts could not reach it, and all provisions had to come in by packhorse. But she was threatened with a worse place, the old castle at Fotheringhay.

"It is damper even than here," she said, "and more filled with ague. And so dark! It has a look of doom about it, and of death. No! I shall never go there, unless they carry me."

It was not until the middle of December that the men came. They were well horsed and armed, all twenty of them. Their leader was the fat old Duke of Suffolk. Besides his armed guard he brought a priest, which I thought strange, for I had never heard of him as a devout man, and there were three priests in the house already.

The Duke showed Katherine great courtesy. He did not call her "Your Grace", but, in the new-fangled French way: "Your Majesty." She could not take offence at that, since it is used only to kings and queens. So she set him at her right hand, and ordered me to taste his food for poison, as well as her own.

During dinner all the conversation was friendly. Katherine

asked for news of the Duke's new wife, her godchild Kate Willoughby, and the Duke said she was blossoming like the rose. Then Katherine asked after Lady Willoughby, whom she called: "My dear friend and cousin, Doña Maria." The Duke spoke of his new mother-in-law with respect. Katherine brought me into the conversation, urging me to tell the Duke how Lady Willoughby had comforted my mother on her deathbed.

"I should be ready to die happy," Katherine said, "if I had such a friend beside me. But none of my old friends are allowed to visit me now; I am fenced off, surrounded by mud, like a beast in a field."

Dinner was now almost at an end. Over the sweetmeats the Duke began timidly: "Your Majesty, you could live at your ease, in a house of your own choosing, with your daughter and all your friends about you, and the King's good will, if only . . ."

"If only I were a different person," said Katherine, "with a different understanding of right and wrong. Well! God has made me what I am. You will not persuade me to take the oath, not if you talk for a week. Is this all you were sent for?"

"No, Your Majesty," said the Duke. "I am afraid . . ."

It was not a form of words. He *was* afraid. He had fought in France, laid siege to castles and stormed cities; but he blushed like a girl before Katherine. "I am afraid my mission is to help Your Majesty move all your household to Somersham."

"Somersham!" said Katherine. "Why, that's worse than Fotheringhay. It's in the very middle of the fens. If I go there I am consenting to my death, and suicide is mortal sin."

"But His Grace the King wishes . . ." began the Duke.

"Let him come here and tell me so himself! Until then, I shall see nobody."

Katherine rose and went into her private apartments, her

ladies following. The door, the heavy oak door the Bishop had built to keep his petitioners out, shut behind her. Then we all heard the noises of bolts and padlocks. The Duke stared, unable to believe what was happening. Then he called his men-at-arms. They came clattering up fast enough, but what could they do, except stare at the door as stupidly as their leader? Now and again one of them would try to shake it, to test the strength of the bolts.

A voice came from behind the tapestry. "Please make less noise. Her Grace has a headache."

It was one of the old Spanish ladies, speaking through the "squint"—the slantwise hole in the wall. The Duke, having discovered this hole, began to speak through it himself, pleading with Katherine to be reasonable.

We all heard her answer. "If you want me to go to Somersham, you will have to break down the door, and take me by force."

The Duke was by now so angry that he said he *would* break the door. He went to the palace gate, muttering that he would soon find a tree which could be felled to make a battering ram.

Instead, he found the people. All the women of Buckden village were standing at the gate. Even as I watched more women came hurrying, I suppose from the farms and villages round about. None of them spoke; they only pressed round the Duke, and looked at him. Every single one was weeping.

"Out of my way!" the Duke shouted, and his men clattered their swords. The women drew back a little. But the Duke did not advance. He glared about him, and then went back into the palace. I heard him asking his men to find out whether there was any back way into the Queen's apartments.

There was a way, a door from the walled garden. But, just as the Duke's men found it, this door was slammed in

their faces, then barred and bolted as strongly as the other. The kitchen-maids were giggling because the men had been so slow to find this back way. Katherine's ladies had just made use of it to bring in a supply of bread and cheese and ale—enough to stand a long siege.

There was no access through the windows; they were built in the old fashion, high up, and small.

The Duke sat down to write for fresh instructions. He sent two letters, one to the King, and one to Cromwell. Then he summoned the whole household—servants, priests, Don Francisco and myself -into the hall. He told us that the lady we served was only Princess Dowager, Prince Arthur's widow, and must not be addressed by any better title than "Your Highness."

We had heard all this before. But now we were ordered to swear it, and that meant swearing we acknowledged Anne Boleyn as Queen. This was what the Duke's own priest had come for—to administer the oath.

I wished that *I* could write for fresh instructions. My one desire was to take the oath and have done with it. But everyone else was refusing, from the priests to the women who scrubbed the floors. If I contradicted them I should be known as Cromwell's man, and that would make me useless as a spy. So, after Don Francisco, standing beside me, had refused the oath, I too refused.

"And you an Englishman!" the Duke shouted at me. "You make me sick!" He shook his great fist in my face. I wondered for a moment if he were play-acting. But that was impossible; he was far too stupid. Cromwell could not have told him about me. I was frightened, and grew more so as the Duke stormed up and down the lines of the servants, his great red neck swelling with rage. Suppose he lost his temper altogether, and killed me? Then I should be a most unwilling martyr.

But in the end he abruptly told the servants to go and

prepare supper. "The Princess Dowager may be content with bread and cheese," he said, "but I am not." He had the tapestry moved away from the squint, so that the smell of roast meat would reach Katherine.

But even when he shouted through the squint that supper was served, no answer came from within. I politely offered to taste the Duke's food for poison, but he said I looked more likely to put the poison in. "You with your Spanish mother, and your Spanish face!" One of his own men tasted for him, while I sat, trying not to be noticed, near the foot of the table. It was a silent meal. All our tongues were stilled by the sight of that still door. Before the Duke went to bed he set men to guard it, and said: "They must come out some time, to empty their piss-pots."

This did happen, at the garden door, and no doubt it was because of the blackness of the night that the man on guard there had the pot emptied over him. Before he could recover himself the door had been slammed again.

I heard this early the next morning, when I found the Duke's men grumbling over their sleepless night. Even those who had not been on watch were comfortless, because Katherine's maids had sworn there was not a feather bed in the house, and had even begrudged them the hay out of the barn. They told one another how the Duke had prayed for some illness to prevent him coming on this errand.

If he *did* hate his errand, that made him all the more bad-tempered, when, that morning, he tried once more to make us take the oath. Even his brain had now fathomed what I could have told him at first—that it was a mistake to assemble us all together. Though Katherine's household was not so large as her daughter's, there were a hundred of us to outface the Duke's twenty men. Now the Duke began to call us in one by one. I might have seized the chance to tell him I was Cromwell's man. But I was being watched, I knew, through the squint. If I began to whisper, it would

look suspicious. So I said in a loud, clear voice: "If I take a new oath, I shall burn in Hell for perjury, because I swore on the Sacrament to serve Katherine as my Queen."

"Who put that into your head?" shouted the Duke. "Here you are, all singing the same tune. Who gave you the note?"

I made no answer. But it happened that, as the Duke shooed me out of his presence, the next person to come in was Father Barker. I kneeled at his feet in the doorway, and cried out: "Father, give me your blessing!"

Which he did, being a very simple old man. The hint was clear enough, even for the Duke. "It's you!" he shouted at the priest. "You're the one telling them this tale about perjury! And that other priest—what's his name? I'll show the lot of you!"

After the Duke had shouted at them for some time, both Father Abel and Father Barker confessed to telling the rest of us that we would go to Hell if we took the oath. They added that they still thought so. The Spanish priest, de Athequa, confessed nothing, because he did not speak a word of English. But the Duke ordered his men to seize all three priests, and lock them in the porter's lodge.

Katherine cried out her protest through the squint. "You are leaving me without a priest - and on a Sunday! Do you want me to live without hearing Mass? Do you want me to die unshriven? There is nobody now to hear me confess."

The Duke, still addressing her as "Your Majesty", offered her his own priest.

"I cannot confess in English," Katherine said. "I do not know how to do it. I have always confessed to Father de Athequa. He is an old man now; he can do no harm to you or the King. You cannot say that he has encouraged my English servants; he cannot even speak to them."

After a great deal of huffing and bumbling the Duke let the Spaniard go, but kept Abel and Barker locked up.

"They are *English* traitors," the Duke declared. "I shall take them to the Tower."

"Then take me too!" said Katherine. "I shall go with you willingly, if it's to the Tower. Once I am there the people will know I am a prisoner, and pray for me."

"There is no need for any of this," the Duke said. "Your Majesty has only to accept the verdict of Archbishop Cranmer, and all the bishops, and Parliament, that you are divorced from the King."

"The King has indeed divorced himself," said Katherine, "from his own goodness, gentleness and honour. But not from me. No! That he cannot do. I am his wife, and Queen."

This her servants overheard, and because of it they went on refusing to take the oath, although they had been badly frightened by seeing the priests locked up.

The priests had company. The weeping women of the day before were back; they pressed up to the porter's lodge, and cried out words of encouragement. After dinner they grew so noisy that the Duke sent his men to drive them away.

One of the men came back and whispered in the Duke's ear. He jumped up from the table and hurried outside, with all of us following.

What we saw, beyond the crowd of women, was a great crowd of men. They were common farmers and labourers, but all of them carried arms. We looked into a forest of crossbows and longbows; alone among them shone a bright new arquebus. The Duke roared at the people to disperse.

They did not. The man with the arquebus, who seemed to be a gentleman, came through the crowd, and bowed before the Duke.

"Sir," he said, "we are His Grace's loyal subjects, and we obey His Grace's command, which is to meet here on the green and shoot at the targets, every Sunday afternoon."

"Not this Sunday," the Duke said. "I represent the King, and I order you to go home in the King's name."

"You mean in the whore's name!" one of the women cried out, and another echoed her: "In Nan Bullen's name!" Then there were the usual curses for Cromwell. And above all the cry: "Long live the Queen!"

The Duke's men-at-arms were cross and yawning from their bad night, but at that moment they might have chased the crowd away, for they had their weapons ready, and most of the peasants had not even strung their bows. But instead of giving his men the order to charge, the Duke began to make a speech. It was a very tedious speech. He described the King's first qualms of conscience, on finding that the Scriptures had forbidden marriage to a brother's widow. He explained how the Pope had at first been inclined to grant the divorce, but had then been captured by the Emperor's troops. So the Pope was not really the spiritual head of Christendom, but the plaything of contending armies. This being so, the King could do no better than consult his conscience, and the advice of learned men throughout the universities . . .

This is rather what the Duke intended, than what he actually said. He had the arguments, but he got them so arse upwards that it was no wonder the people heard him in a sullen silence. While they listened, they got their bows ready.

I could not bear to hear the cause I loved made ugly by such a defender. I went indoors to warm myself.

In the great hall, by the squint, Don Francisco was arguing passionately and loud. (There was no need to whisper, since he was speaking Spanish). As I came in he called me over to bear witness. "At least two hundred armed men, isn't it so, Tomeo?"

"Perhaps not quite so many," I said.

"But far more than the Duke has," Don Francisco went on. "And Your Grace, every one of them is loyal to you."

Katherine said: "Yes, they are Englishmen."

She paused. It seemed to me, as I listened through the squint, that I could hear her thinking. She went on: "I have loved this country ever since I landed here. After six weeks of Purgatory on the stormy seas, we came to a place like the gardens of Paradise—the grass green, though it was autumn, and the trees all burning red. And everywhere I saw tall strong people with rosy cheeks, laughing and calling words which I could not understand, which I knew as words of love. God be praised! The roughest of the common people have never spoken one unkind word to me. It was left to the nobility . . ."

Her voice drooped. I thought her body must be drooping too.

Don Francisco said: "Your Grace, you have only to ride out now, and put yourself at their head . . ."

"I know," said Katherine. "I know."

"Your Grace, if you slip out by the garden, you can reach the stables before the Duke sees you. And then you can appear suddenly on horseback in the midst of that great crowd. They would follow you."

"Yes, they would follow me. They followed me towards Scotland, before we knew that Flodden was over and won. Do you know when I loved the English best? It was when they knew that the Scots were defeated. Some of them wanted to carry the war into Scotland, and burn everything as far as Edinburgh. I spoke to them and told them that I meant to make a peace. I told them that the widowed Queen of Scotland was the King's own sister, and I meant to be her friend. The English heard me out without a murmur. They went to their homes like lambs my sixty thousand men with no looting by the way, no pilfering, no brawling. And so God saved this Blessed country from the scourge of war."

"But some wars are just!" pleaded Don Francisco.

"It may be I have brought the English little good," said

Katherine. "I am all the more unwilling to do them any harm."

While she could not be moved to come out, the people could not be moved to go away. At last, in the early December twilight, they began to disappear. But the rushlights flickering from every cottage window, and especially from the alehouse, showed that they had not gone far.

In the morning the Duke received his fresh instructions. (His messengers rode fast, since they had the King's warrant and could use posthorses.) What was even more to the point, he received a great sum of money.

He was not, it seemed, to remove Katherine by force. But he was to leave her in discomfort, with only her Spanish attendants. All the English were to be dismissed, and arrears of wages were to be paid only to those who took the oath.

On those terms, most of them took it. They still felt it as a betrayal of their Queen, but now they would not have to face her afterwards. As for the heat of Hell, they feared it less than the cold of a December walk back to their villages, perhaps through many a hungry day and night, without money.

Some of them, as they left, lingered by the gate, talking to the village people. The Duke sent his men out to tell them that they must leave at once "on pain of death." Being ignorant, they did not ask what law could put a man to death for talking to his friends. They went.

"New servants will be sent to you," the Duke told Katherine through the squint. "Loyal men and women, who have already taken the oath."

"Then they will not be my servants," Katherine replied. "Only my jailors."

I was in a worse dilemma than before. I too had arrears of wages due to me. But, as a gentleman, I could not let it be thought that I was taking the oath for money. For a moment I considered telling the Duke that his great speech had convinced me. But then Katherine would never speak to me

again, and Mr. Cromwell would be left without one person who could warn him of her plans.

So, in a loud voice, making sure I could be heard, I refused the oath again.

"To Hell with you, then!" shouted the Duke. "I'm not leaving you here to make trouble. You can come riding with your holy fathers, to the Tower!"

We started out at first light the next morning, Father Abel, Father Barker and I, with our feet tied under the horses' bellies, and our hands tied behind. The Duke himself rode ahead of us and round us were his men-at-arms; but all these guards could not prevent the people from pressing close to us, asking the priests for their blessing, and swearing to pray for me. While we were caught in this crowd, the crowd began to cheer, and we looked round and saw Katherine.

She had waited only till the Duke was past her threshold, to come out of her retreat. Now she stood at the gate of the palace, with her ladies behind her. In the dim daybreak we saw her kneel and join her hands, to show us prisoners that she prayed for us. Her ladies too sank on their knees, and all the people followed suit, kneeling in the cold mud, because it was her wish. The Duke shouted to his men to ride faster out of this place. I felt more than ever angry, to think *he* was on my side, while on the other side, the wrong side, was a creature of such noble grace.

The two days of the journey were hard to bear. At the inn at Stevenage, the priests and I lay all night with our hands tied, on straw. The straw tickled me, and since I could not use my hands to push it down, I tried to make a comfortable place by rolling my body to and fro. Then the straw got inside my shirt, and I was worse off than before. My writhings woke Father Abel. He told me to be patient. He had been in prison before, for writing a book against the divorce, and this time (he said) he would think himself lucky if he got nothing worse than clean straw.

The next day was even worse. My feet being tied under the horse's belly, I could not move my legs, and the horse's body chafed me all the time in the same places. The chafing hurt worst of all when crowds pressed against me. Silly women held up bottles of ale for me to sip; they thrust sweetmeats into my pockets, and pennies, too. My hands were not free, so I could not give them back their money. And Father Abel, riding behind me, called out that I must take it; I would need every penny in the Tower.

No prisoner was ever so glad to reach his prison. When we came at last into the Tower, our bonds were loosed. We were all three thrust roughly into a bare room, with nothing but a heap of straw in one corner. I was so tired that I would gladly have lain down in it. This time it was Father Abel who complained.

"You have no right to put us in such a place," he told the jailor. "We have money; we can pay a for a proper bed."

"Penny a night from each of you, then," the jailor said.

"Nonsense!" Father Abel said firmly. "It is a penny altogether, if we share one of your big beds. And before we part with our penny, we see the bed properly made, with a feather mattress, blankets and clean sheets. It's all in your own table of prices, in the guard room downstairs."

"Why, it's Father Abel!" said the jailor. "Forgive me, Father; I didn't recognise you. You're looking so well!"

"No doubt you will do your best," answered Father Abel, "to make me as pale as before."

With his experienced help we were soon settled in a proper bedroom, with supper (twopence each) and a coal fire.

"We pay a penny a bushel for the coals," Father Abel said. "And none of your ha'penny faggots; they burn too quick. And we want common small beer to drink; that stuff you brew in the wash-house is far too dear."

When the jailor left us alone, he added: "If we are to be martyred for our Queen, we may as well be comfortable first."

So there I was, trapped in the company of a determined martyr, who took it for granted that I should share his fate.

It was not until the next morning, when both priests were busy with Mass in the Tower chapel, that I managed to write a letter to Mr. Cromwell. I gave the jailor a penny to see it delivered. He said the charge would be sixpence, and (lacking Father Abel's advice) I had to give him that.

It was already evening when the jailor came for me. He told me I was wanted "for questioning."

In a warm, bright, panelled room, Mr. Cromwell was sitting behind a table well furnished with cold game pies. He was fatter than ever, and beaming with good fellowship. I was so extemely glad to see him that for a few minutes I managed to take my eyes off the food.

"My dear boy!" he said. "Sit down. Let's help ourselves. Forgive me for offering you this cold fodder; I didn't want any servants to interrupt us."

He poured out wine. It was stronger than any I'd had for many a day, and Mr. Cromwell kept urging me to drink more. I was glad to, for the pies were very spicy, and made me thirsty.

"You've grown thin as a rake!" Mr. Cromwell said, laughing. "Handsome as ever, though. I wonder—did the King's daughter fall in love with you?"

"No, I'm sure she didn't."

"Ah, modesty, Tom—too much modesty! That was always your trouble." Mr. Cromwell grew gayer. "And the Queen? I mean the Princess Dowager. Did she notice your bright eyes?"

"Sometimes I thought she was glad of my company."

"And you, Tom? Did she touch *your* heart?" Mr. Cromwell laughed, and I laughed, much too loudly. By now my head was reeling with the wine. I spluttered: "I don't fall in love with women of that age."

Mr. Cromwell asked quietly: "Then why did you refuse to take the oath?"

That sobered me. I knew him well enough to understand that he was in dead earnest. The food, the wine—these were to throw me off my guard.

"Sir," I said, "I thought you would understand. I am the only Englishman who can speak Spanish to her. So far as I know you have nobody to take my place. If I took the oath while she was listening, she'd refuse to speak to me again."

Mr. Cromwell nodded. "I hoped you'd say that. Because that means, Tom, that you're willing to take the oath now."

"Certainly," I said.

Mr. Cromwell rang a bell. A priest came in, carrying a pyx. There and then, I kneeled down and swore upon the sacrament that I acknowledged Anne Boleyn as Queen, and her daughter Elizabeth as lawful heir to England.

"So help you," dictated Cromwell.

I said: "So help me God."

When the priest had gone I burst into tears. "Come, come!" said Mr. Cromwell. "Have some more wine."

So I did, but it made the tears flow faster. My tongue too was slipping out of my control, but I managed to say: "To think you distrusted me!"

"Oh, not to say *distrusted* . . . But you see, Tom, there was this curious thing about your last letter."

I blinked like an owl, trying to remember.

"What did I say in my last letter?"

"It was what you failed to say. Come, come, Tom—surely you don't think you've done your duty, if all you tell me is that old Katherine sent her daughter some good advice? Of course she did; she's not a stupid woman. What we wanted to know was how did you get into the house?"

"Didn't I say?"

"You did not. And none of my men on guard there saw you come or go. Oh, fools, of course! But . . . it's a hard house to get into. How did you do it?"

The look on his face made me sober. I explained.

"Then this Arthur Bowers," Mr. Cromwell said, "and a man with red hair whose name you say you don't know, and a woman with one eye whom you didn't see—these are the only three you know of? Well! Three is enough to arrest at first; they're sure to lead us to more."

"But sir," I said, "if you arrest any of them, it will be known the information comes from me."

"Why? Surely there must be others in the secret?"

"I believe not, sir. Only Lady Salisbury, and Don Francisco, and Kathérine herself. And she made me swear on the Sacrament to keep the secret, before she told me."

"Ah! You swore on the Sacrament, did you? You don't consider that binds you?"

What a lively mind my master had, to set a trap so readily! But I was not confused.

"I'm bound by the oath I swore just now," I said, "because that was a lawful oath. What comes first is my loyalty to the King, and you. Any oath which contradicts that loyalty is unlawful and therefore not binding."

I said this all the more majestically because of the wine. Mr. Cromwell smiled.

"Forgive me, Tom," he said. "I distrust everybody. And so would you, in my place. There's a good many . . . gone off." Mr. Cromwell wrinkled his nose, as if speaking of sour milk. "Benet was on the turn, before he died. Archdeacon Benet, who pleaded His Grace's cause at Rome. He'd been going to see Monsieur Chapuys by night. You'd be surprised how many do. Chapuys thinks he's clever; he's taken a house by the river so that his visitors can come by water. The boatmen are *my* men, though; not a Papist among 'em. I know all the visitors' names. And if they go on foot instead, that makes it easier for my men to follow 'em. They *need* following. You know the old saying, Tom. 'The French vice is lechery; the English vice is treachery.'"

"Then I'm a Frenchman," I said.

"But you've seen enough of England now to know that there's treachery everywhere."

"There is indeed!" I said. "Especially among the commoners. I never heard anything so stupid and unjust. They all swear they love the King. And yet they hate what the King does. They blame it all on you."

"I know," said Mr. Cromwell. "That's the proof of my success."

I thought my brain must be clouded by the wine. While I gaped, he went on: "Tom, what do you think is the greatest danger facing England?"

"An invasion by the Emperor."

"Can you think of nothing worse?"

"A civil war. A rising by the people."

"That's it! Now, Tom, how would you prevent that?"

"I'd make sure the King's men were well armed."

"What—his bodyguard? A hundred men? In a country of three million people? Every farmer has something to shoot with, if it's only an old crossbow. Do you think, if the King relied on force, he could keep his throne a single day?"

I said: "Not . . . Not if the people were all of one mind."

"Ah! But I thought what you'd seen lately had convinced you that they *were* all of one mind."

"I hope not, sir. There must be *some* who understand the reasons for the divorce. And nobody ever did think much of the Pope. Why, I've seen a woman in tears for 'the old Queen', and in the next breath laughing at the old religion. The truth is, people are confused. And they grow more confused than ever when they hear a speech like the Duke made at Buckden."

"Confused . . ." repeated Mr. Cromwell. "Well then! They didn't shoot. Men won't shoot, if they're not sure of the direction. The truth is, the governance of men is akin to

the black arts. Not sense, not reason, not even plain force, but a sort of magic . . . Why, Tom, you've just been watching it, in Katherine. The Duke had twenty men-at-arms, and she had nothing but a door, which could have been made matchwood in five minutes. Then why did she send him away defeated?"

"She has a better brain."

"So have you. And yet he could truss you up like a fowl. No! She has this magic art of making people obey her. Sometimes I wish our present Queen . . . But what I want you to understand is that the King has this magic. It shines out from him; he need not even give an order; what he wishes will be done. Only there's this, Tom; a King has more to do than a Queen. A King has to levy taxes, call men to the wars, order executions . . . There must be moments when the people feel inclined to hate him. And if they *did* hate him he would be lost; our country would be lost; we should be back to the wars of York and Lancaster. Or even worse—to the state of Italy, a battleground for endless foreign armies. No, there has to be a man at the King's right hand, a man whose duty it is to be hated instead of the King."

I said: "Is that really the only way to govern?"

"Oh, the Venetians will tell you that they have a better system. We're savages to them. But, in our savage way, we keep the peace, and this is how we do it. In Cardinal Wolsey's time, the King wanted money. Wolsey tried to levy taxes without asking Parliament. If the people had paid, the King would have taken the money. Since they refused, the Cardinal took the blame. He was easy to hate—a Cardinal with a bastard son, and pox. And now you see I'm easy to hate—an upstart, the son of a brewer, a man who made his own way by studying law . . . In the speech of the people the word 'lawyer' and the word 'crafty' go naturally together. So I can do many things which His Grace cannot do—sending you on your mission, for example. And when you tell me

that Chapuys is plotting to steal Mary away by water, *I* am the one who sends her far inland, among people who will watch her day and night. She told you herself the King could not be cruel to her. Even Katherine, who lived with him so long, does not believe that he could separate her from her daughter, unless he were misled. Misled by me."

"It's hard," I said, "that you should have to sacrifice your good name for your country."

"Well!" said Mr. Cromwell, patting his belly. "My country is at least not starving me. And you're not badly off yourself; there's quite a nest-egg waiting for you at the goldsmith's. The question is now, Tom—what are we going to do with you?"

"Must I go back to Katherine?" I asked.

"My dear boy, as you yourself told me, there's nobody else who can do it. The trouble is, if we set you free at once, Katherine will smell a rat."

"I have thought of that," I said. "If I must stay here a little while, I must; but may I have a room to myself?"

"How do you fancy this one?" Mr. Cromwell asked. I looked round for a bed. "It's in here," he explained. He opened an inner door to show me another panelled room, with a good fire burning, and a really handsome bed. "You see that further door?" he said. "It leads to a walled garden where you can walk. For a man who needs a good rest, there are worse places than the Tower."

Then, waving my thanks aside, he abruptly asked: "What do you think of the two priests who were brought here with you?"

"Abel's the ringleader," I said. "I think old Barker would take the oath fast enough, if they were separated."

"Yes, we'll keep those two apart," said Mr. Cromwell. "And in a damper place. And neither of them must know what's become of you. Then, in a few weeks, we'll give it out that some great lord or lady interceded for you."

"Sir," I suggested, "would it not be better if somebody really did intercede? If I were to write to Lady Willoughby, and ask her to ask her daughter, the new Duchess of Suffolk . . ."

"Tom," said my master, "you have a head on your shoulders!" He added with a grin: "Try and keep it there! Now, here's money for expenses. What else would you like? Books?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; and I would like a tutor, to improve my French. I cannot understand what Chapuys says in his native tongue."

"I'll see that somebody comes in to teach you every day. And you shall have a manservant. Unless you'd prefer a maid servant."

"I would indeed, sir."

Mr. Cromwell laughed. "By the way," he said, "your friend Margaret is married. Did you know?"

It was a blow, but I carried it off with composure.

"No faith in women," I said.

"Oh, as to that . . . But she did well for herself. Married Joe Thaxted, the carpenter who made the furniture for my house. I set them up in one of my villages, out at . . ." Mr. Cromwell, who never forgot a name, waved his hand as if he had forgotten this one. "I gave her a smallholding, a couple of cows, to keep her out of mischief while he's in his workshop. You see, the silly girl was pregnant."

I said nothing. He went on: "I was thinking of you, Tom. You're a young man; you have your way to make. The King's delighted . . . He *would* be delighted, if he knew what you'd done. No need to spoil everything because a daft young girl has got herself into a fix."

The tears gathered in my eyes. They were tears of pure gratitude, because Mr. Cromwell had shown me such fatherly kindness. What should I have done if he had not been there to smooth every obstacle out of my way?

# 7

The woman who came every day to make my bed was very willing; I admit I can remember nothing else about her. Except that she was married to one of the guards at the gate. Since it was death for him to leave his post, we could always be sure that he would not interrupt.

I remember my tutor better; he was a man of my own age, the son of a French merchant living in London. He was so determined not to speak our barbarous tongue that I was compelled to speak French. Mr. Cromwell sent me French romances and love poems from his own library, and soon I found them pleasanter to read than anything in English. Once, after my willing woman had rolled out of my bed, I composed a poem in French about a knight, who, dying of love, had strength enough only to kneel before his lady, and kiss the hem of her dress. I proudly showed it to my French friend. He laughed, and would not stop laughing until I chased him out into the snowy garden, and pelted him with snowballs. He threw some back, and soon we were both laughing -a strange sound, within those walls.

Besides romances, I read whatever old chronicles Mr. Cromwell could find me, in Latin, French or English. It was a new pleasure, to find out something about the history of my own country.

Once a week or so, the Lieutenant of the Tower, Sir William Kingston, would invite me to dine with him and Lady Kingston. They were dull company, too careful ever to say anything of interest.

This was a lazy, comfortable time, and of course it had to end. It was at Christmas that I wrote to Lady Willoughby. She was much moved. Mr. Cromwell forbade her to see me, and so she thought that I was in one of the dungeons. She sent me letters which she thought Mr. Cromwell did not read. So I knew that her daughter Kate, the young Duchess of Suffolk, was nagging away at the Duke. Later I heard that the Duke had ventured to speak to the King; and the King said (without seeming much concerned) that he would pardon a few prisoners for Easter.

Mr. Cromwell kept me in the Tower for Easter Day, so that I could confess and take communion from one of his own priests. Then he told me I should be released in a week's time. I spent that week indoors, and fasting, so that I should look pale and thin when I went to thank Lady Willoughby.

Sure enough, she burst into tears at the sight of me. Her house in the City was mine to command; good meats and fine wines were brought before me until I could take no more. I did not utter one word of untruth. I told her: "I wish I had been born your son."

"If only you had!" she said. "To bring up a daughter is like fattening a lamb for the butcher's knife."

Her daughter had now been married for half a year to the fat old Duke. She came home almost every day, running to her mother like a child playing truant. But this child was a truant *to* school; she came to see the household priests, her tutors, and talk to them in French or Latin. She refused to speak Spanish, out of perverseness, because it was her mother's native tongue. Instead, she talked of learning Greek, if she could find a teacher.

"That's enough!" Lady Willoughby said. "They're all heretics, the teachers of Greek."

The girl laughed. Whatever her mother said, she would laugh at or contradict. By her marriage to the Duke she had acquired a step-daughter called Frances, who was older than herself. When Lady Willoughby remarked that Frances was to be married to the young Marquis of Dorset, a very good match, Kate laughed and said: "Oh yes, a good match! My step-daughter is a vicious cat, and he'll be sharp enough to clip her claws."

At fourteen, this naughty child was too young for me to fancy, but I did not like to think of her in the arms of the old Duke. She seemed gay enough; only when she fell silent I saw the misery in her face. To cheer her up, I thanked her for her part in my release.

"If you'd heard how I tormented the Duke over you," she said, "you would have been sorry for him. But I reckoned he could do that for me, at least!"

Lady Willoughby said I might stay as long as I liked. I thanked her, but said I was determined to ride north again, to Katherine.

"I knew you would say that," Lady Willoughby said. "It renews my faith in God, to see that there are still young people who know what loyalty means, and honour. God knows where you learned it from, with all the old men setting you such an evil example!"

She fitted me out for the journey with new clothes and a horse and money. (I never touched my mounting hoard at the goldsmith's.) So I deceived her, but I did not tell her any lies. As we parted I pleased her by reporting what Katherine had said of her: "I should die happy, if I had such a friend beside me."

I scarcely needed any lies, even for Katherine. She was very willing to believe that I had been released without taking the oath.

"It shows how good the King is at heart," she said. "He never could be unjust or angry for long. Oh, I believe he will soon come to himself, now that the Pope has given sentence in my favour. Do you know, Tom, when the people of Rome heard the sentence, they lit bonfires in the streets! The King will not be able to stand against all the people of Christendom."

She believed this all the more because the King had let her move to Kimbolton Castle. It was a miserably old-fashioned place; it even had a drawbridge and a moat. Besides, it was barely ten miles from damp, foggy Buckden.

"And yet," Katherine said, "it seems a great deal further from the fens. I shall be better here."

She went on believing this for a few days. Then commissioners came from the King. For the first time, they told her outright that the penalty for refusing the oath was death.

"Let it be death!" said Katherine quietly. "But in a public place, and by the axe, which will be quick."

Instead, she died by inches, over the next eighteen months. It was not poison (for I tasted all her food) nor rheumatism (who dies of that?) but a malady the doctors could not understand.

She made herself no better by keeping to her own apartments, seeing nobody but her Spanish attendants, and me. If she had gone outside, she might have met the new comptroller of her household, Sir Edmund Bedingfield, or some of her new servants, who would have called her "Princess Dowager." So, imprisoned by her pride, she lived without fresh air.

But not without news. The visits of Chapuys were now forbidden (of course by Mr. Cromwell) but Don Francisco carried messages. It came so naturally to me now, to act the part of Katherine's loyal servant, that when we had news favourable to her I smiled, and gave every sign of rejoicing, before I thought what I really felt. Except when we had

word that the bog savages of Ireland, led by their own savage noblemen, had made a rising in Katherine's favour. It was hard for me to pretend to rejoice at that, when I thought what suffering it meant for loyal Englishmen. But Katherine did not rejoice at it either. "It is like any other Holy War" she said. "They have begun by murdering an Archbishop." And she would not send one word to urge the savages on.

I think she regretted that later, when the King began to execute his English traitors. Katherine wept all one summer's day for the monk Richard Reynolds. "Reginald Pole's friend! He was so steadfast that he put the noose round his own neck, as if he had been putting on the chain of some great office. The most learned monk in England, and the best! If Cromwell can procure *his* execution, what hope is there for Bishop Fisher, or Sir Thomas More?"

A few weeks later, when the time came to pray for the souls of Fisher and More, I prayed beside the rest, yes, and shed tears when they did. It was another part of me, hovering somewhere outside in fresher air, which felt glad that these men, who had harried so many poor gospellers to the fire, had at last got what they deserved.

Because I had this other life to live in the spirit, and the hope of going back to it in the body, I was more cheerful than Katherine's real devotees. *I* was not always indoors. A daily ride in the fresh air (St. Neots was within easy distance) kept me in good health.

So I was better able than others to make Katherine laugh, or to amuse her with stories, when her eyes grew too dim to read or sew by candlelight. She liked to hear me tell parts of the histories I had read. Once I told her the story of Matilda, and her long wars with King Stephen, and the tale, put about by scandalmongers of the time, that she was really all her life in love with him. They even said that Matilda's son Henry Plantagenet was really the son of Stephen.

"Perhaps it was true," Katherine said. "If she loved him, she would fight all the more cruelly."

Coming back from one of my rides, I found Don Francisco quarrelling with Doña Isabel, in the damp garden by the moat, where Katherine could not hear them.

"How dare you say it's tedious?" he shouted at her. "Tedious? To serve our Queen? Are you a young girl, crying for dances and fairs?"

"I know my duty to the Queen as well as you!" Doña Isabel shouted back. "I could be very well content to serve her, if she were in a convent—one of the good convents, where they know how to look after sick ladies. She'll never get well here. Oh, if only Her Grace had taken the Pope's advice at the start!"

"What—and become a nun?" said Don Francisco.

"Why not? She would have avoided all this."

"How can you say that? How can you forget how splendid she looked, when she told the two Cardinals: 'I will become a nun, if my husband the King becomes a monk.' "

"Oh, to you it's all splendid!" answered Doña Isabel. "This great fight for a great cause . . . And yet the old Queen of France was reckoned a saint, and she consented to go into a convent, so that King Louis the Twelfth could marry again."

"But our Queen could not bastardise her daughter."

"There was no need. The child is legitimate if the marriage is made in good faith, whatever may happen afterwards. No! Our Queen could have done what other ladies do, when their husbands grow tired of them. She could have accepted the wrong done to her, accepted the divorce—and then Pope and King would still be friends, England would still be part of Christendom. She weeps when she hears of all these innovations; images thrown down, monasteries rifled, the King insisting he's Head of the Church. But what's a stranger innovation than a woman insisting on her rights? What

other Queen has ever openly disputed the date when her hymen was broken?"

Don Francisco began: "But the Queen's conscience . . ."

"Oh, don't talk to me about conscience!" Doña Isabel cried out. "Setting up her own conscience against the Pope—isn't that what the heretics do? The King was always using that word *conscience*—when he meant he was in love with Anne Boleyn. And Her Grace uses it rather than say that she is in love with the King."

"How dare you talk as if that were the same sort of love?"

"Oh, but it is, it is! I hear her pray for him, every night and every morning, before she prays for her daughter. Even now, when his hands are red with the blood of her friends, I hear her praying that God should let her see him, only see him, only once, before she dies. I tell you she is dying of unreturned love."

Here I interrupted them, to ask: "Do people really die of unreturned love? I thought that was only in romances."

"So it is!" Don Francisco declared.

"It is not!" said Doña Isabel. She turned on me. "You smile when you hear me talk of love. You think I have never been young. But I have been a girl; I have been a wife; I *know*."

I did not dispute that the Queen was really dying. Before Christmas, 1535, I told Mr. Cromwell so, and the King gave Chapuys permission to visit her.

Kneeling at her bedside, Chapuys told her that the King was sorry for her illness, and hoped she would recover.

Katherine must have wanted to believe him, but her good sense made her ask for proof. "Will he come to see me, then?" she asked. "Will he at least let me see Mary? Surely he will let me see Mary now?"

"I am sure he would, if it were not for the Lady," Chapuys said. "*She* is more spiteful than ever. You know she set her aunt to keep watch on the Princess? A common woman, a

knight's widow,Lady Clere. Now the Lady is angry with this Lady Clere, for treating the Princess too kindly, and showing her too much honour. *She* said: 'Remember the girl is only a bastard.' But Lady Clere answered her back. 'If she were nothing else, she is the daughter of a King. And if she were the daughter of some poor gentleman, yes, and a bastard as well, I should honour her still, for her goodness and virtue'."

Katherine asked: "Are you sure of this?"

"Certain," said Chapuys. "I heard it from one of the Lady's waiting women."

"I had heard already," Katherine said, "the people given orders to be cruel to Mary find that they cannot carry out these orders. It must be so, or else by now they would have poisoned her."

"They meant to drive her to despair," said Chapuys, "by making her a waiting-woman to the Lady's child. They thought she was bound to take a spite against the child, and say things about it which could be reported to the King. But the Princess from the first has loved the child, saying that it was innocent, and, besides, her sister. She has found a comfort in teaching the little creature to walk and talk. I believe the sight has melted every heart but one."

"Then I was right," said Katherine, "and Mary will outlive her persecutors. She will be blessed, she will be beloved, so long as she remembers to return good for evil. Oh, my dear, dear friend, although I love you, I am so glad that I resisted your advice!"

Chapuys said, very low: "Are you sure you are glad?"

"Oh yes! If you can get a message to Reginald Pole, tell him this from me—it is a good thing to die without blood on your soul. I know God can reproach me with other things. I was proud, I stood stiff on my own rights, when the Pope's legates asked me to go into a convent. If I had done that, if I had signed away my rights, then England would be safe in

the old religion still. But I could not believe God meant me to tell lies about my marriage."

"You did right," said Chapuys. "God will reward you."

Chapuys stayed three days. On his last night there, we all heard angry voices outside. Katherine sent me to find out what was going on. The front gate of the castle was open; by the light of the cressets I saw the comptroller, Sir Edmund Bedingfield, standing outside under the slanting rain. He was shouting: "I cannot let down the drawbridge for you, unless you show me a pass from the King."

"I will show you my papers when you let me in," said a voice out of the dark. It was a woman's voice, a foreign voice, and I knew it.

Sir Edmund went on protesting: "How can I let you in?"

The voice answered with perfect confidence: "You will have to. I have fallen off my horse, and I'm covered with mud. In this filthy weather I'm not going one mile further."

I whispered to Sir Edmund: "That's Lady Willoughby—Doña Maria de Salinas, cousin to the Emperor. She may really have a pass."

"Come on!" said the voice. "I can't wait all night."

I suppose that Sir Edmund must have given some sort of order. But when I heard the drawbridge grinding down, it seemed as if its ropes were worked by the strings of Lady Willoughby's voice. I thought of Mr. Cromwell and his "black arts."

Lady Willoughby swept across the drawbridge and into the hall, a manservant leading two horses behind her. Sir Edmund began asking her again about her papers. She ignored him and turned to me.

"So *you're* still here, Tom Vaughan. I really wonder you haven't made yourself scarce yet."

I was so startled that I moved aside to let her pass. One of Katherine's maids was already holding the door open behind her. And so, suddenly, she was inside Katherine's apartments.

Sir Edmund was wringing his hands. What would become of him, when the King heard of this?

"I'll tell him it was all my fault," I said. And then (knowing him loyal) I whispered: "The King will not mind. He has good reason to be pleased with me."

But this was too much for Sir Edmund to understand. He stared at me, and then urged me at least to see what this Doña Maria was doing.

I knew even as I knocked at the bedroom door what she would be doing. Sure enough, she was sitting on the bed, her arm holding Katherine as it had once held up my dying mother. Her eyes met mine in a long hostile stare. But Katherine smiled.

"Tomeo!" she said. "I was just going to send for you. Please tell the servants to bring supper for my friend. And see that her groom is treated well in the kitchen. And, Tomeo, see that my other dear friend"—she smiled at Chapuys—"has all his linen ironed and aired ready for the morning. He must go then; his permit was only for three days. It does not matter; I am not going to die. Now that my dear Doña Maria is here, I know that I shall get well, and see my daughter again."

The next day I heard her voice calling gaily to Chapuys as he took his leave, and I could have sworn that it was the voice of a young, strong woman. But that night her doctors were suddenly summoned, and the following morning I was told to attend her, with parchment and pen and ink.

"It is not my will," she said. "I know the English law; I must not make a will, since I am a married woman. But there is a letter to be written."

Lady Willoughby whispered something in her ear.

"No, leave me alone with him a little while," said Katherine. "I know what I am doing."

I never doubted that she did; her dying eyes expressed a living mind. And her voice was clear while she dictated,

in careful English, a letter to "my lord and dear husband."

She urged the King to remember "the health and safeguard of your soul, which you ought to prefer before all worldly matters, and before the care and tendering of your own body, for the which you have cast me into many miseries and yourself into many cares." She added that she forgave him, and prayed God to forgive him too.

Then she begged him to be a good father to Mary, and to provide for her servants.

"Lastly do I vow, that mine eyes desire you above all things."

I said: "But, Your Grace, who can give this to the King?"

"You can," said Katherine. "You're in his favour. Lady Willoughby has had a message from the people in the Tower. It is known that you lived in luxury while you were there; you were allowed to go into a garden; you played with snowballs and laughed like a schoolboy. No! Don't speak! Don't tell me any more lies. You're a spy. That's not surprising. The time has been, I might have been surprised, to find a lad who looks honest, a gentleman born, descended from one of the noblest families in Spain, spying on an old woman. But it's all of a piece with England nowadays. What's happening here is so ugly, so much against God! You're only a small part of that. I don't believe you did me any harm. How could you, when I never committed any treason? If you have harmed me, I forgive you. But consider! Who is to forgive the harm you do your own soul?"

I did not answer her. I was too much afraid of telling her everything. Somehow, I got myself out of the room.

Once outside, I shook myself awake, and set about arranging practical matters. I had by now persuaded Sir Edmund that I was more than I seemed, and he gave me a letter of credence, so that I could use posthorses. For the start of the journey his own best horse was saddled ready for me.

Booted and spurred, I waited in the hall till two that afternoon, when Lady Willoughby came out of the bedroom and said: "Yes! You have all got what you wanted. She is dead."

Before dusk of the next day I was at the door of my master's apartments in Hampton Court. But I was met by a servant I did not know. It seemed these were not Mr. Cromwell's apartments; they now belonged to Sir John Seymour—a name new to me. The servant seemed unwilling to answer my questions. Full of a sick foreboding for my master, I began to ask other servants where I might find him, but I was interrupted.

"Are you from Kimbolton?" asked a page. "... Then His Grace will see you at once."

So I found myself in a little room, alone with King Henry.

"She is dead?" he asked eagerly. "She really is dead?"

As I knelt before him he patted my shoulder and said: "You've been a good boy, Tom. We must see what can be done for you."

Seeing him in such a pleasant mood, I told him of Lady Willoughby's unauthorised visit. He waved the matter aside. He even smiled. So then I dared to give him Katherine's letter.

But I did not dare to look in his face while he read it. Looking humbly at his feet, I heard a sound. Was it a sound of anger? It seemed more like a snort of contempt. Fixing my features into a sympathetic smile, I looked up.

His cheeks were wet with tears. "A good woman!" he sobbed. "A good, good woman! Now *she* understood the duties of a wife."

He waved me out of his presence, which was a relief, since I scarcely knew what to say next.

Once again I tried to find my master—and again I was interrupted. This time it was a lady who came running up.

"The Queen must see you," she panted. "At once, at once!"

Queen Anne was in her bedroom, washing her hands in a basin of solid gold.

"Is it true?" she cried out. "Is it really, really true?"

Since I had for so long heard nothing of this Queen, except through the lips of her enemies, I had come to think of her as a clever, crafty woman. But now she laughed and chattered like any silly girl. With her hands wet, waving aside the towel that one of her ladies held out, she ran about calling for her father and mother.

"Oh, I shall wear nothing but yellow!" she said. "Yellow for rejoicing! And my ladies must wear yellow—all of you! Call my tailor; call my sewing women; they must work all night to make us yellow gowns."

I thought a dark colour would have looked better on her great belly (for she was pregnant). But her ladies obediently went about her errands, bustling as fast as anyone can bustle in a long, trailing gown. Watching the lady who had held the bowl while the Queen washed, I thought how uncomfortable it must be for royal attendants, to do a maid's work in lady's dress. Trying not to splash the velvet she wore, this lady carefully poured the dirty water into a bucket, and wiped the golden bowl. She was about to lock it away, when Anne snatched it out of her hands.

"Here!" she said, thrusting it at me. "This is for you—for bringing me the best news that ever I had in my life!"

I took the golden bowl, not seeing how I could refuse, and bowed low, making her many thanks. But the giddy thing had already forgotten me. She was dancing up and down, kissing the Countess of Wiltshire, whom she called "Mother" though this was in fact her stepmother.

"Mother, mother, what do you think of me now? A queen, a real queen at last!"

The older woman smiled, but, I thought, sourly. Anne turned to me again.

"How did she die? Are they going to say we poisoned her?"

"Impossible!" I said, and almost forgot to add: "Your Grace . . . Nobody could have given her poison. The people round her—the doctors, the priest, the ladies in waiting—were all her old Spanish friends."

"Her snuffling lousy Spaniards!" Anne exclaimed. "And in spite of them she's dead. She's dead, she's dead!"

She began to dance, whirling one of her ladies around the room with her. I stood clutching the bowl, though it was heavy, not liking to let go of such a precious piece. Then, at the door opposite me, I saw the King.

I knelt down immediately, circling the bowl with one arm. Some of the ladies saw me kneel, and looked round and curtseyed. But Anne, for a moment, noticed nothing. She was blind with her dancing and singing. "She's dead, she's dead and now it's the turn of her daughter!"

The lady she had forced to share her dance now dropped away from her into a curtsey, and at last Anne turned her head. She saw the King looking at her, as he had looked all this time, in a dead silence.

"Why, my Lord!" said Anne, with a high screeching laugh, and would have run lightly to him, but that her belly made her waddle.

He put out a hand to keep her at arm's length. "Madam," he said, "you are to order mourning clothes for yourself and your ladies, to attend the requiem Mass for Katherine."

"For Katherine!" Anne exclaimed. "What—are you going into mourning for her? You'd do better to write her one of your little love songs."

She was laughing in his face. He turned away and left her without a word. She called after him; "No, no—I didn't mean it. I like your songs!" But he was already gone.

She turned on her ladies and began to curse them, for not giving her warning before the King came. "You want me to miscarry again!" And then in a shrill wail: "That woman's death will be the death of me!"

I was glad to take myself off, and the bowl with me, before the giddy creature could revoke her gift.

Then, at last, I found Mr. Cromwell. He was in a little room, nothing like so fine as the apartments he had left. But he greeted me as cheerfully as ever.

"You've done well for yourself with your news," he said, looking at the golden bowl. "Come, sit down. Have some wine. I hear there's talk of poison."

"Not from me."

"I hope not, Tom, indeed. Because, as you tasted all her food, who could have put the poison in it, but you?"

"Towards the end I did not taste her food," I said. "She had nothing but liquid messes prepared by her ladies on her own fire, before her eyes."

"That's a good point," said Mr. Cromwell, making a note. "In case the foreigners ask . . . Well, my dear boy! So you've proved yourself well able to do as you're told. Though perhaps not very well able to guess at what you haven't been told."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"You must have seen that this death was . . . not unwelcome to the King."

"But sir! He cried like a baby. He said: 'She understood the duties of a wife.' "

"Indeed?" said Mr. Cromwell. "When *I* saw His Grace, just afterwards, he said to me: 'God be praised, we're free from the fear of war.' No tears then."

"But he *did* weep," I persisted.

Mr. Cromwell smiled.

"And then," I said, "he was angry with Anne Boleyn—with Queen Anne—for rejoicing at the news."

I described what I had seen. Mr. Cromwell seemed to be laughing inside himself.

"Did you think to wonder," he asked me, "how the King knew that the Queen was rejoicing?"

"By chance, I suppose . . . Do you think, then, sir, that one of her ladies told him?"

Mr. Cromwell said: "The Queen has only two months left before her time. We must hope that after so many sad miscarriages she gives birth to a living boy. Until then . . . Why, Tom, where you've been, you've surely learned some discretion. Enough, it seems, to please the King. His Grace mentioned you very kindly. Very kindly indeed."

Mr. Cromwell's fatherly smile filled me with such love that I could not bear to deceive him. "Sir," I said, "the King might not be so pleased if he knew that I had been a very poor spy. I was found out." I told him Katherine's dying words.

He laughed. "What! She did not find you out until too late! You did well, Tom; you deceived the cleverest woman in England. I did not expect so much."

"But Doña Maria—Lady Willoughby—knows," I said. "That means you can't use me again to visit the Princess—I mean the bastard Mary. Or Lady Salisbury. Or any of their friends."

"There are advantages, though," Mr. Cromwell said. "Now that you're known, we can arrest that gang who got you into Beaulieu."

As he spoke I had suddenly in my mind Arthur Bowers' crucifix, and the writhing body of Christ.

"It's well worth while to make the servants talk," said Mr. Cromwell. "Servants know everything; the gentry always forget that. It's a pity we can't arrest the Spaniards. We'll have to give them all safe-conducts home . . . And we can't use you as a witness in any open trial. Not until we know what your next undertaking . . ." He smiled. "Well! Till that's decided, we must find you a corner to sleep in. You may find it cramped in this part of the palace."

I asked him then—who was this Sir John Seymour, who was living in his old apartments?

"Tom!" he cried out. "You've been away from court a long time. Sir John Seymour is the father of Jane."

"Of who, sir?"

"You've just been looking at her, in the Queen's bedroom. The fair one, the most beautiful of all the Queen's ladies."

"I can't call her to mind, sir."

"What! Have you lost your eye for a beautiful woman? You've surely never seen one lovelier than Jane Seymour. You must get to know her, Tom; you must get to know the whole Seymour family. They're people of great importance. I shan't lose by lending my apartments to them; they're all very grateful for such a convenient place, with direct access to the King. Why, my dear boy! We must learn to move with the times."

# 8

I went back to live in my master's house. Not his house in the City (which he now used mainly as a place of business) but his great new country house, a mile and a half outside London. It stood by the river, across the meadows from Stepney.

Around my master's table I found some familiar faces—Beery Willey's, for example. Little "Crumvell" was there too; how his jaw dropped when he saw me for the first time with my master's arm familiarly round my shoulder! I had little to do with him; my master told me that I was to work apart from the other secretaries, and took me to a pleasant room overlooking the river.

"Here's a new language for you to learn!" he said. "Italian."

I knew better than to ask him why. I settled down obediently with the tutor he had found for me, Fra Bartolo, a priest who had fled from Genoa because he was accused of heresy. (Of loose living too, he admitted later on.)

I could read Italian at once. Most of the words can be puzzled out well enough, if you know Latin and French and Spanish. But when I spoke it (as when I spoke French) I made throaty Spanish noises. Fra Bartolo would laugh so much that he scarcely had breath to correct me.

The first time I found my master in a talkative mood, I said: "Sir, isn't Reginald Pole in Italy?"

"What of it?" Mr. Cromwell said.

"Why, sir, from all I've heard, he's the real danger. Katherine wasn't prepared to fight, but he is."

"And yet," said Mr. Cromwell, "the men I've placed in his household keep writing to assure me that he can be won over for the King. They are so sure of it that the King has been urging Reginald to write a book on the divorce. He is very much respected for his learning; if he were on our side . . ."

"But Chapuys said—"

"You mustn't believe the romances of Chapuys—not even if the dear old fellow does believe them himself. He's never met Reginald Pole, and I have. When the saintly lad was here he told me a good deal about what he'd seen in Rome. A bordello at the Pope's gate; the Pope himself thinking of nothing but money; whores riding in triumph, escorted by the liveried servants of bishops—all that shocks the saintly Reginald more than it might shock you or me. It's true he lost his head when he saw the King. He was very naughty—very naughty indeed. But then he apologised, and wrote the King a letter . . . Not such a bad letter. Oh, he opposed the divorce, but not on the grounds that the Pope must always be right. He was more concerned with the danger of two heirs disputing one throne, the Wars of York and Lancaster again, and so on. He's not such a fool. I believe he *does* want to marry Mary; why else has he been so careful not to make himself a real priest? He's only a canon, and those vows can easily be dispensed. But what do you do, when you want to marry a girl? Why, you show yourself a good friend to her father. And so he would have done before, only he took a great dislike to Anne—to our present Queen. Which now, perhaps—"Cromwell broke off and shook his head. "There's only one thing I don't like about Reginald Pole. He won't

let anybody see this book he's writing. For the King's eyes alone, he tells people. But if he means it for the Pope's eyes . . . If he means it to be printed . . . Do you think you can learn Italian by June?"

"Sir," I said, "I know I can."

Is there such a thing as an Englishman who does not long to go to Italy? Warmed through the winter by this happy prospect, I could never see enough of Fra Bartolo. Charmed by his tales of Italian courtesans, lost in Italian romances, lulled by Italian poetry, I scarcely questioned the events in my own country. It was only when I tried to recollect them afterwards that I thought how strange they were.

At the end of January Queen Anne gave birth to a seven-month boy, born dead. A few days later the guest of honour at our table was a pretty young widow, Lady Elizabeth Ughtred. Mr. Cromwell paid her so much attention that I thought he would make Mrs. Cromwell jealous. But no; Mrs. Cromwell showed the guest nothing but plump dimpling smiles. When the lady had gone Mr. Cromwell turned to me and said: "She's a sight for a young man's eyes, eh, Tom?" And then, softly; "I hope that when her year's mourning is over she'll marry my son."

Feeling my way, I said: "Such a beautiful woman must come from a good family."

"The best, Tom; the very best! She's the sister of Jane Seymour."

I thought it hard I should not have a pretty woman of my own. There was a maid I fancied, but when I caught her in a cupboard she used nails and teeth on me. As I let her go she said: "I suppose you know—your Margaret's got a boy near two years old."

Her manner was too insolent; I did not even trouble to reply.

Why, I thought, should I look at serving girls? There were ladies enough at court—young ladies, married to old men.

Lady Willoughby's daughter Kate, the Duchess of Suffolk, was old enough now to amuse me. At a court ball she made me dance with her, not so much for my sake as to tease her mother, who had warned her against me. I enjoyed the dance. We leaped higher and higher, until we seemed to be floating, and Kate laughed over her shoulder at her husband, whose leaping days were done.

It was like any other court ball. People were trying to hurt one another, and trying to show that they were not hurt. Queen Anne was dancing with her handsome brother, laughing and chattering more loudly than before. "How pale she looks!" Kate whispered. "That last miscarriage nearly killed her." The King was dancing with Jane Seymour.

"I hate that cat!" whispered Kate in my ear.

I said I had never heard Jane Seymour say anything catty.

"That's just it!" said Kate. "She never says *anything*."

Yet Kate, like the rest, smiled and curtseyed to Jane Seymour, taking little notice of the Queen.

While we rested from the dancing there were songs written by the King. There was also an "interlude", written by Beery Willey, in which a couple of comic players mocked the Pope's trade in relics.

During this I saw Kate Willoughby slip out. I followed her and caught her behind a door, and kissed her. Her pretence of a struggle ended in bringing her body closer to mine. But when I begged her to see me alone, she said: "Oh, I couldn't be wicked! Not *wicked*. The old fool dotes on me."

"He'll never know," I said.

"My mother's right!" she said, breaking away. "You're not a man to be trusted."

I thought I should get my way in a couple of weeks, and so I might have done, if Kate had not fallen under the influence of another Kate—Katherine Parr, the beautiful young wife of old Lord Latimer. This was a very pious gospelling lady, and so chaste that not even those who

pretended to share her religion could make any headway with her.

I had more luck with another lady, whose name I leave out, since her children are still alive. She came to meet me often, in a cloak, by night, in a little inn by the river. Her maid (a greedy, money-grubbing creature) kept watch for us.

This lady, a countess, was as desperate for my love as the servant girl Margaret had been. She did not offer, though, to tramp the roads with me. She meant to keep her money and her husband, but in bed she murmured: "Now, now I've taken my revenge on him!"

It hurt my vanity, to think she loved me only as the instrument of her vengeance. But did I love her, except as a countess? As a woman, she was nothing like so beautiful as Margaret. But as the sort of girl I was not good enough to marry . . . Each of us had a sharp and private pleasure, and when we delighted in each other most, our pleasures never met.

I was proud of handling all this with such discretion that nobody knew, not even my master. He was busy all this time, in endless conferences with the King. But once he looked into my Italian lesson, to ask how much I knew. On hearing Fra Bartolo's flattering reports he invited me to see his collection of Italian books. He had Dante and Petrarch and Boccaccio all in print, along the shelves. But in a chest, under lock and key, he kept a manuscript, so elegantly copied that it must have been as costly as a jewel. "It would be worth your while to know Italian," he said, "if it were only to read this book. They praise Plato for writing about a republic which never existed, or could exist, outside his imagination. But this is the work of a man experienced in real government. See what you can learn from it."

I read on the title page: "Il Principe." And then the author's name: "Nicolo Machiavelli."

About the beginning of April, Beery Willey said: "They say our poor Queen Nan is very melancholy. She can find nothing to do but sit in the quadrangle court of Greenwich, setting her little dogs to fight each other. She's always alone—that is, alone for a Queen. A few ladies here and there."

"Alone?" said some simple soul. "Why, where's the King?"

We all laughed.

That same night Mr. Cromwell came from Westminster and said: "Well! Parliament is dissolved at last. That's cleared the decks."

All that month of April, 1536, there was a great deal of coming and going by night. On May 1st we heard the news about the Queen's brother, Lord Rochford. He had been the principal challenger in a tournament at Greenwich, a ceremonial affair, watched by the King and Queen. Suddenly (we heard) the King rose and left, looking angry. Lord Rochford rode out of the lists, and there and then was arrested for high treason. So were two gentlemen, Henry Norris and Sir Francis Weston. Later there was a rumour that a third gentleman, William Brereton, had already been in the Tower three days. There was another prisoner too, a court musician, Mark Smeaton. The only thing that any of us at the table could remember about these men was that they had all stood particularly high in the King's favour. Fra Bartolo said: "Perhaps they are the lovers of the Queen." I laughed and told him that a foreigner could never understand England. We all waited eagerly for our master's appearance, but he did not come home that night.

The following day Fra Bartolo and I were reading Machiavelli, when a servant came bursting in. "Sir, look out of the window! Sir, have you seen?"

A barge was sailing up the Thames to London. Our master sat in the bows, and facing him was the Queen. A lady sat on either hand of her, but she had no pages, no canopy, no cloth of gold. A woman alone, clear to see in

the bright, cold afternoon, she sat upright, facing the way that she was going.

Beside my master there were other courtiers, huddled and cloaked against the cold, so that I could not make out which was which. But one man was leaning so far forward that he might have been spitting into the Queen's face. We could hear nothing, but from the look of him he was in the midst of a furious tirade.

"That's her uncle!" I exclaimed. "The Duke of Norfolk. Has he turned against her?"

"Who," asked Fra Bartolo, "is the man with a chain of office round his neck?"

I strained my eyes to see the face, but it was in shadow. Then the head turned, and I remembered my own imprisonment. I said: "That is Sir William Kingston, Lieutenant of the Tower."

The Queen did not seem to be answering her uncle. She only faced him out, and all of them. She was not now beautiful; besides her pallor, her face was marked with grief. Only she kept her head up, and this gave her a look of Katherine.

My master worked hard, because the prisoners refused to admit their guilt. At last the musician, Mark Smeaton, who was not a gentleman, confessed to his adultery with the Queen. Her brother's incest with her was harder to establish, but his wife gave evidence against him. On May 17th Anne Boleyn's five lovers were executed; she herself was beheaded on May 19th. On May 20th the King was betrothed to Jane Seymour, and they were privately married a few days later.

Still my master could not rest; he had to arrange that Parliament should meet, and humbly congratulate the King on his new marriage. Parliament also had to declare the two-year-old Elizabeth, like Mary, a bastard, and settle the succession on Jane Seymour's children, who were not yet conceived. It was my master's doing that nobody spoke against this.

And still I thought of nothing but my journey to Italy. Even when I was summoned to another court ball, I scarcely thought about what was happening. There was the usual business of pretending not to see the lady who was really my mistress. I danced with Kate Willoughby; she looked over her shoulder at her husband. The King danced with Jane Seymour, who, as before, did not utter a word. There was, once again, an interlude written by Willey, about the Pope's profit in pilgrimages. Everyone laughed at Willey's rhymed couplets (which I thought rather clumsy). Everyone was gay. There might never have been on the face of the earth such a creature as Anne Boleyn.

On a fine June evening Mr. Cromwell invited me to supper in his private rooms. One other person was there, a gentleman of about thirty, so tanned by the sun that the roots of his golden hair shone out against his dark brow.

"This is Michael Throgmorton," said my master. "And, as you might guess by his complexion, he comes from Italy. In fact, he's brought us news of Reginald Pole."

The visitor said quickly: "But I did not know what was in the book."

"Well, well!" said my master, clapping him on the shoulder. "Cheer up, Michael. What you need is good wine. Forgive this cold fodder; I didn't want any servants to interrupt us."

We all three sat eating game pies, which, being well salted, gave us a thirst for the wine. My master kept refilling the visitor's glass, more quickly than he refilled mine. I knew why, of course. This Michael Throgmorton was in the situation I had been in, two and a half years before. Mr. Cromwell had sent him out as a spy, and feared that he might have changed sides. I felt proud to think how my own situation had altered. Now I was trusted; I was the right man to help my master get the truth out of a suspected traitor. I played my part well, asking questions about Italy,

airing scraps of my own Italian, until the guest became so merry and so talkative that he could be thrown off his balance by Mr. Cromwell's quiet question.

"But, this paper of instructions Pole gave you—you knew what was in that?"

"Sir, of course I knew. It was open for me to read. The book was in a casket, locked and sealed."

"And when the paper, which you *did* read, mentioned that the book contained—what was it?—'vehemency and sore reprehension', you did not try to find out what that meant?"

"How could I, sir? Surely you understand that I never could?" He turned to me for sympathy, but I kept my face as motionless as a stone. So Michael blundered on: "My master—that is, Pole, not my real master, because you are my master, sir, and always have been, though I had to pretend, but, sir, at heart—"

"You were going to tell us how it happened that you brought this book all the way from Italy, without having the least notion what was in it."

"The seals, Mr. Cromwell. I could not break the seals. They were for the King's hands alone."

"And you could not do something so simple as asking Pole what was in the book?"

"I did, sir—truly I did. He said it contained some rebukes, but he trusted that His Grace would accept them as proceeding from pure love."

At this Mr. Cromwell laughed out loud. "That's Reginald!" he said. "That's young Reginald, and his knowledge of the world. He thinks His Grace will be glad to read every bit of scandal, every dirty little scrap that's ever been picked up from the gutters of Westminster! Even that old story about Mary Boleyn . . . And you thought so too, Michael. You must have thought so too. Else why did you bring the book?"

"I did not know what was in it, sir. I swear I did not know."

"If you say that again," said Mr. Cromwell, "you will force me to think you a very poor spy. What! You've all this time been living in Pole's house, making him trust you—or so you tell me—and yet you could not get a sight of what he has been writing."

"He wrote alone in his own bedroom, sir. He kept the manuscript locked in a chest, and the keys were always at his girdle. And sir—he is never drunk."

"Never very well fed, either, if I know him," Mr. Cromwell said. "And stingy to his attendants. He's made you as lean as himself! Why, Michael, what cause have you to be so grateful to him?"

"I'm not grateful to him, sir. Only to you."

"Then suppose you begin to tell me the truth."

"I have, sir. I swear, I swear—"

"Michael! You have not told me when and where Pole means to print his book."

"Sir, he says he means never to print it at all. I told you, sir; he says it's for the King alone."

"Does he take me for a fool?" shouted Mr. Cromwell. "Or do you? Do you, Michael?"

"No, sir. Oh no."

Mr. Cromwell put his great red face almost into Michael's face. "Then why is it in Latin?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Why should one Englishman write to another in Latin, if what he writes is not meant for the learned men of Europe?"

"I suppose he might put it in Latin to keep the servants from reading it. Why, sir, if it's in Latin, I shouldn't be able to make much of it myself."

"Michael! Have you never learned Latin?"

"I have tried, sir. Amo, amas—whack. Amamis, amatis—whack. They beat it into my bottom, sir, but it's all gone out of my head."

"You're such a fool, Michael!" said my master. "Such a

fool that . . . I can't be angry with you." He laughed. "Come, come; let's finish this bottle."

Mr. Cromwell began to tell us about the Abbess of Whorwell, and what she had said when questioned about her relations with a bishop. We laughed so much that Michael soon plucked up courage, and gave us his own tales of Italian monks. After one of these Mr. Cromwell, wiping the tears of laughter away, said: "You took that one from Boccaccio!"

"From who?" said Michael. "No, I never could read those foreign books. Hard enough to *talk* Italian. I can make the servants understand what I want, but when Pole starts chatting to his foreign friends—"

"A fine ambassador you'd make!" said Mr. Cromwell, still laughing. And then, suddenly, quietly: "So you think he doesn't mean to print his book?"

"He says he doesn't."

"And he may mean it. He can't have quite forgotten that he has brothers in this country. As you have, my dear Michael." Mr. Cromwell put his arm around the shoulders of his guest. "How is your brother, Michael?"

"Very well, sir."

"And your brother's wife?"

"Well as ever, sir."

"Good, good. And her niece—the miracle?"

"Do you mean Katherine Parr, sir?"

"Yes, Katherine Parr—Lady Latimer. They call her the miracle at court, because she's the young wife of an old husband, and beautiful, and chaste. Which is a rare thing, as Tom knows—eh, Tom? You must be very proud of your family, Michael. Remember you leave them behind you, when you go back."

"Must I go back, sir?"

"That's the King's wish, Michael. The King has written a letter, which you are to deliver. His Grace wishes our

friend Pole to know that he is not displeased, and would be glad if Pole could come home to discuss the matter in person.".

At this I laughed, but Mr. Cromwell looked me in the eye with quiet, serious rebuke. He went on: "The only question, Michael, is whether our friend here, Tom Vaughan, should go back with you. I think he should not."

"Sir!" I cried out. I had had so little thought of this conversation turning to my own disadvantage that I was quite thunder-struck, and burst into tears. "Sir, am I not to go to Italy?"

"Not now, Tom. Not yet. Consider—if we want Pole to come here, would it be wise to frighten him by sending a new face? No; let him see only Michael, our dear simple Michael, whom everbody thinks incapable of guile. Come, cheer up, Tom; I mean to send you riding round the country at your ease, with your own servant, to enjoy the summer weather."

So he did soon afterwards, not, of course, for my own enjoyment, but so that I could report to him on some of the monasteries not yet suppressed.

I went on a good horse, with a groom to attend me, and another servant to carry my letters to Mr. Cromwell. I took my ease in the best rooms of the monasteries, and was fed like a hog for the slaughter. The abbots hoped that if they treated me well I should report to Mr. Cromwell in their favour.

But how could I do that? Wherever I went, the villagers cried out against the monks. I heard stories of cruelty and injustice which I would not have believed, if they had not been confirmed by so many voices. The Abbot of Lylleshill in Shropshire turned a poor couple out of their farm, though they had paid their rent, only because the wife refused to go to bed with him. The Abbot of Jervaulx laid information against a man as a runaway monk, and I found the poor soul in prison, loaded with chains. He denied that he was,

or ever had been, a monk. "I was bound apprentice when I was thirteen," he said, "and then my master sold me to the Abbot, and the Abbot shaved my head and made me wear a white coat, but, before God, he never made me a monk. And as for running away, sir, that's not true; I took my leave openly in the sight of them all; there was nobody tried to stop me. Sir, all my trouble is because I married a wife. The best woman in the world, sir, but the Abbot couldn't abide it; he can't endure to see one of *his* men well married. He complained to the Bishop; he said I kept school in the night. How can I keep school, sir? I never could read, until my wife taught me."

I had no legal powers, but my master's mighty name was enough to set this man free. When the blacksmith began to strike the chains off his arms and legs it was torture to him, for the iron had bitten deep into his flesh. At last he was free, but he could scarcely walk; his arms hung useless by his sides. He cried out: "Now I shall never be able to work for my bread! Oh, my poor wife! My poor, poor children!"

Being richly entertained by the Abbot of Jervaulx, I told him he could well afford to pay this man a pension. Which he did, with no more urging than my mention of "Mr. Cromwell's pleasure."

Besides cruelty, I found much fostering of ignorance, because ignorance brought profit. At Bromholme in Norfolk the monks had the "only true" girdle of the Virgin Mary. They lent it out to be worn by women in childbirth, at sixpence a time.

As I rode north I found this "only true" girdle again, at Shelford, at Arthington Monialium, at Calder, at Blanchland, at Conyshed, at Kirkham—always fetching a good rent from the people. I lost patience when I found the Virgin's girdle once again at Fountains Abbey, the pride of Yorkshire. Here the Abbot seemed to be a learned

"You must know," I said to him, "that this piece of old rope can't help a woman in childbirth."

The Abbot smiled. "And what," he asked, "*can* help a woman in childbirth?"

As for convents . . . A nun's habit is well made to hide her shape, and yet the village people always seemed to know which of the nuns were pregnant. At St. Mary's in Chester there was only one, a nun called Margery Shakelady, but at Lampley Monialium there were three pregnant at once—one of them for the sixth time. If I spoke to such women of their vows, they said: "What vows?" Half of them had been shut away in convents by their families, against their will. Sometimes this was their punishment for some scandalous love, sometimes an act of spite by a stepmother, and sometimes it was done out of mere despair, because a girl's dowry was not enough to get her a good husband. "I was made to take my vows by force, and so they don't bind me", I heard again and again.

Of course there were some truly pious houses. After a time I could tell what sort of a convent I'd come to, by putting my nose inside. If the nuns were good religious women, they did not wash their bodies . . . Katherine, I thought, had known what she was doing when she refused to go into a convent.

"Why," I asked (or thought I asked, for I was silent, riding through the dales below the moors) "Why did you cry and wail for the old religion? If you had seen what I have seen, you'd hate the very sight of a monastery."

I was reasoning, not with myself, but with Katherine. Many and many a time, as I rode along, I was deep in such a silent conversation, as if her ghost had taken up its lodging in my mind.

"Can't you see, will you never see, that my master is right?"

At Westderham in Norfolk two of the monks came to speak to me alone. They declared that they found it impossible

to live chaste. They did not believe any man could. (I heartily agreed.) These two, being priests as well as monks, heard confessions, and they assured me that any man who seemed to be living without a woman was in secret practising sodomy. "And this," they said, "is all because we are not allowed to marry. We believe God set our King over us for this reason, to take away this cruel and evil rule, which forces us to a pretence of celibacy."

I thought this good sense, but when I said so to my master, he cried out with sudden sharpness: "Do you think that His Grace is a Lutheran? Married priests, indeed!" He shook his finger at me in reproof.

"But sir!" I said—and then corrected myself. "My Lord!" (For he was now Lord Privy Seal.) "My Lord, they say Archbishop Cranmer has a wife, and carries her with him wherever he goes, hidden in a clothes basket."

"Have you any more silly gossip to tell me?" said Cromwell. "Did you meet anyone who wanted to keep the the monasteries as they were?"

"The abbots, of course," I said. "The Abbot of Tavistock said to me: 'So your master is busy with closing of monasteries. Cardinal Wolsey was always closing monasteries, and you know what happened to him.' "

My Lord laughed . . . I laughed myself, at everyone who opposed such a just and necessary reform. I rode out gladly to fight the northern rebels, in October 1536. But there was no real fighting in this rising, the one the rabble called "The Pilgrimage of Grace." With no Katherine to lead it, it was all a poor, silly rambling to and fro. With no Katherine to send advice, Mary had already obeyed her father, and owned herself a bastard. So she could not put herself at the head of the rising. Besides, the house that she shared with Elizabeth was well guarded.

For a few days, I know, my Lord feared that Reginald Pole would come riding out of Italy, as he might have done

if he had made good speed, for the Alpine passes were not yet blocked with snow. But he missed his chance. He missed even the renewal of the rising, in February 1537. By that time the Pope had made him a Cardinal (which pleased us all, for Cardinals had always been hated in England). And he travelled as Cardinals travel, with attendants and baggage trains. His mules carried money for the northern rebels, but carried it at a snail's pace, through the deep snow. It was almost two months before he reached Paris, and by that time most of the rebels were bodies dangling in chains. My Lord laughed out loud at the table when he told us that the King of France had refused to see Cardinal Pole, even though he came as Legate from the Pope. Afterwards came an even greater triumph. Pole's errands, as we all knew, were done at the Emperor's bidding, but the Emperor's Regent in the Low Countries was obliged to send him away. The Low Countries depended on their trade with England; they could not face the anger of our King. We heard that Pole, who by now must have known that Parliament had proclaimed him a traitor, was lingering in Liege, hoping for God knows what.

On a fine warm day in July 1537 my Lord took me with him to see the eighty-year-old Lord Darcy, one of the greatest rebels, beheaded on Tower Hill. Lord Montague, Pole's elder brother, also had to be there; he had been one of the judges who condemned Lord Darcy to death.

It was my first chance to see how a real nobleman died. Lord Darcy approached the scaffold at an even pace, bareheaded. While his chaplain prayed aloud, his attendants helped him to mount the steps. The executioner knelt before him to ask his forgiveness. Lord Darcy graciously absolved the man, and gave him a piece of gold. Then he addressed the crowd. He said he was going to die justly, having rebelled against the King. The crowd should take warning by him, and not fall into the sin of disobedience. He

acknowledged the people's applause with a wave of the hand.

And, in the midst of that kingly gesture, he caught sight of Cromwell. I did not think a man of eighty could have stood so upright. "This is your doing!" he cried out "You urge the King to strike off the heads of all his noblemen! Yet there will be one head still, to strike off your head!"

My Lord neither changed his colour, nor gave any sign that I could see. But the executioner nodded to him, and then told Lord Darcy to kneel. Which he did, as if apologising for his outburst. The executioner brought down the axe so swiftly that I could not believe it was all over. Even the gushing blood did not seem real, until the people began swarming forward to dip their handkerchiefs in it, for luck. Then I caught the smell—not the smell of the blood, the smell of the people—and I was afraid I would vomit. It was a little comfort to see that Lord Montague looked more sick than I did. Cromwell only said: "I am surprised. I thought that head was wood from ear to ear."

For more than a year after this there was not one voice raised in England, against my Lord or my King. When Jane Seymour gave birth to Prince Edward, in October 1537, everyone seemed to share in the rejoicing. Even Anne Boleyn's father, the Earl of Wiltshire, came obediently out of his retirement, to bear a candle at the christening. There was mourning soon afterwards, for the death of Jane Seymour, but the King comforted the people by appearing at a window, playing with his baby son. Nobody could dispute this boy's legitimacy, and so there was no more danger of civil war.

Yet there was treachery. A priest loyal to the King denounced Hugh Holland, captain of a small trading vessel, for carrying messages to Cardinal Pole. Hugh Holland was taken to the Tower, where he soon denounced the Cardinal's younger brother, Sir Geoffrey Pole.

Sir Geoffrey was arrested on August 29th, 1538. It was November before he told all he knew. After one interrogation he tried to hang himself, but was cut down in time. Then he denounced his eldest brother, Lord Montague. It seemed that after he had helped to sentence Lord Darcy to death, Lord Montague had said: "Lord Darcy played the fool. He tried to pluck away the Council; he should have begun with the head. I curse him for leaving off too soon."

Lord Montague had also said: "Wolsey would have been an honest man, if he'd had an honest master."

With Sir Geoffrey, he had planned to send a servant overseas, to murder one of the King's servants, Peter Mewtas, because they believed that Mewtas meant to assassinate the Cardinal.

"Mewtas–that loud-mouth!" Cromwell muttered. "It was like him, to boast and not to do."

More and more people were arrested. "You've heard of Sir Nicholas Carew?" said Cromwell to me cheerfully. (I knew him only as the King's Master of Horse.) "You helped us there!" Cromwell went on. "The servants who got you into Beaulieu–they've confessed to getting him in the same way."

Lord Montague's wife had an uncle, Sir Edward Nevill, who had often entertained the King with jokes and songs in his own Privy Chamber. Now it appeared that the songs he sang to his kindred were of a different character. He made rhymes about the King's habits–his large eating, his way of falling asleep over his meals, his outbursts of temper when the great sore on his leg was troubling him worse than usual. The song would always end in some riddling Welsh prophecies, about great events to come.

The Marquis of Exeter, who was grandson to Edward the Fourth, and therefore cousin both to the Poles and the King, had been in every plot.

The servants of all these noblemen accused them. Their

chaplains accused them. Sir Geoffrey Pole accused both them and himself. He admitted, even, that when he rode north to help the King against the Pilgrimage of Grace, he had intended, if it came to a battle, to run away.

Last of all he accused his mother, Lady Salisbury. Cromwell sent two Privy Counsellors to tell her so.

She admitted nothing. She denounced nobody. Cromwell frowned over the report.

"Asked whether Sir Geoffrey Pole ever told her that the King went about to cause Reginald to be slain, says he did, and she prayed God heartily to change the King's mind. And being examined who told her that the Cardinal had escaped that danger, she says both her sons, and for motherly pity she could not but rejoice . . . Examined whether in their communications all three together they have much commended the doings of the Cardinal, trusting he should be Pope one day and come into England again—denies that they ever had such conversation, but has often wished to see him again in England with the King's favour, though he were but a poor parish priest."

About the monasteries, she said only that she was sorry for the wicked lives of the monks and nuns, by which they had brought this on themselves.

"And look at this letter she wrote her eldest son!" Cromwell said. "Treason—and yet not one word in it you can point to."

The letter said: "Son Montague, I send you God's blessing and mine. The greatest gift I can send is to desire God's help for you, for I perceive there is need. My advice in the case you stand in is to endeavour to serve your prince without disobeying God's commandments."

"She's the man of the family!" Cromwell said.

But a few days later he sent for me, and greeted me with delight. "We've got her, Tom! We've got Lady Salisbury, and it's thanks to you. Do you remember those tokens the treacherous bunch were all sending one another—marigolds

and pansies intertwined? There's been one found in Lady Salisbury's bedroom. She burned all her letters, but she forgot to burn that. And, my dear boy, we'd never have known what it meant, but for you!"

Lady Salisbury was sent to the Tower. So was Henry Pole, the son of Lord Montague, and Edward Courtenay, the son of Lord Exeter. These lads were twelve or thirteen—old enough, Cromwell thought, to slip abroad and join the Cardinal. Their fathers were found guilty, and executed. Sir Geoffrey Pole was also sentenced to death, but later quietly released, and allowed to live in his own house near Chichester.

"He's no danger to us now," Cromwell said. "And we've dealt with the other side, the Anabaptists." (Three Dutch members of this heretic sect, and an English heretic called Lambert whom the King particularly disliked, had been burned while the Papists were in prison.) "So now there's only the Cardinal. My dear boy, I wouldn't wish this fate on anyone—but I'm afraid you'll have to read the Cardinal's book."

So, in a locked room, under a pledge of secrecy, I read it.

"Those who have tried to teach you," wrote Pole to the King, "you rewarded with death; those who came to heal you were put to death; so what chance have I, with my exposition of the truth and offer of my remedy?"

Nonetheless he had written 280 folio pages. I found his long-windedness intolerable, though I admired the fine scholarly Latin in which he called Anne Boleyn a whore.

"She must needs be chaste, as she chose to be the King's wife rather than his mistress, but she must have known how soon he was sated with those who had served him in the latter quality, and if she lacked other examples, her sister was enough."

And then: "Are titles given for nothing, or less than

nothing, that men should call you, the robber and persecutor of the Church, the 'Head of the Church'? Your father was a penurious man, but even he founded a few monasteries for the care of the poor. But who can cite any good deed of yours? What are your public works? Pleasure-houses, built for your own gratification, ruined monasteries, wrecked churches, their possessions confiscated to the Crown . . .

"You have destroyed your nobles on the most frivolous pretences; you have filled your Court with worthless men, to whom you have yielded everything up. But what shall I say of the butcheries, of the dreadful executions which have made England the slaughterhouse of the innocent? The holiest and most spotless men, for the new crimes invented by yourself, were put to death in the most horrible and unheard-of manner. The gracious Bishop of Rochester, the unparalleled More, the learned Reynolds, and many others were the victims of your senseless and wicked fury. In their bloody death no torment was spared to them, nor any insult to their religion. All nations mourned when they heard of those frightful tragedies, and even now, after so long a time, as I write the tears come to my eyes. And you are the man who holds that the Pope, on account of his moral deficiencies, cannot be Head of the Church."

After some learned lessons drawn from Isaiah, Pole went on:

"What surer hope is there for your kingdom, and for your personal security, than the general accord as to yourself and your succession? And who but yourself has undertaken to trouble that accord? What have you done, during the past three years, but set everything to work to rob your own daughter, who for twenty years has been recognised as your heir, of her rights, and to make her appear as a bastard? What father ever tried to deprive his rightful daughter of her inheritance, and to give it to the child of a concubine?" And then Pole recalled the execution of his half-witted uncle, in the previous reign.

"The King, your father, was perhaps too careful to remove all hindrances to his children's succession, but he was not far-seeing enough to expect that you would be ready to put obstacles in the way of your own children. Oh, if your father could come again; if he could see me, the son of the sister of that man whom, notwithstanding his entire innocence, he sent to death, merely because he stood too near the throne, and might in time become an obstacle in the path of his own progeny; if he could see me, me, I say, the son of that house from which he feared danger, defending his succession; while you, his own son, are wickedly striving to destroy it, how would it seem to him?"

Towards the end of the book he summed up his view of the King's character.

"You have squandered a huge treasure; you have made a laughing-stock of the nobility; you have never loved the people; you have pestered and robbed the clergy in every possible way; and lately you have destroyed the best men in your kingdom, not like a human being, but like a wild beast." Unless the King repented, according to Pole, there would be nothing else to inscribe on his tombstone, except: "He has spent enormous sums to make all universities declare him incestuous."

Besides the book there was a letter in English—Michael Throgmorton's instructions. This was a sort of postscript, written after the execution of Anne Boleyn. Pole expressed his hope that the King would see God's hand at work, now that Anne Boleyn's iniquity had been exposed.

At this I smiled. I cannot explain why, because I cannot explain my own state of mind. That Anne Boleyn and the men who died with her were innocent, that my master had tortured Mark Smeaton into making a false confession, and had done his worst to get false confessions out of the others—this I never once admitted, even to myself. And yet, when I saw this phrase of Reginald Pole's,

I thought: "So he really believes her guilty! What a simpleton!"

I called my mind sternly back to the point at issue, which was not Pole's simplicity, but his treason. All that I have quoted so far was no more than might be expected from any adherent of Katherine's. But there was this:

"Is England another Turkey that it is to be ruled by the sword? Englishmen before now, when they were oppressed, have divided the state against the King; they have called him to account for reckless extravagance, have set him aside for the violation of the constitution. In bestowing the crown, they reserved the right to preserve their old freedom, and to keep an eye on the administration. Who maintains that all property is the King's? Thou, oh my country, art all; the King is only thy servant and thy instrument. Renew the old spirit within thee, and friends will not fail thee. The Emperor, the greatest of monarchs, will not refuse his help. Were he already in arms against the Turk, and on the point of setting his rule upon the Bosphorus, I would follow him and cry aloud: 'Turn thy sails, and pursue a worse enemy of the Faith, and a greater heretic than may be found in Germany. My oppressed country calls thee, oh Caesar, and had she not waited for thee, she would already have shaken off the tyrant.' "

"So here you have it in his own handwriting," said my Lord. "He is calling on the Emperor to invade us. Now, is there any doubt that the sentence of death, passed against Reginald Pole by Parliament, is just and right?"

"No doubt at all," I said.

"But, my dear Tom, the question is—who is to carry it out?"

# 9

When I understood what it was I had to do, my first feeling was pride. I was trusted by my master. I was trusted by my King.

The doubts which followed were all of practical questions. "How shall I come near the Cardinal, without Michael Throgmorton seeing me?"

"I want him to see you," Cromwell said. "And to recognise you, and to know you come from me. It is Michael who must carry out the execution. Your part is to help him escape afterwards. A horse, a ship—I leave the means to you. You'll have money enough, and your own bright wits."

"But if Michael refuses . . . ,"

"Remind him of his family. A brother, three promising nephews, all doing well as things are."

"Sir, should I not have a promise to offer, as well as a threat?"

"Oh, I think we can promise him a monastery. Not Fountains Abbey, you know, but one of the smaller ones. And then we mustn't leave you out, must we, Tom? Never fear, we'll find a monastery for you."

"And a letter to an heiress?"

Mr. Cromwell laughed. "You mean to set yourself up for life? So you shall, if you succeed in this. But don't you come

back to your heiress with the pox! France is riddled with it. And remember, Tom, their customs are different from ours. When you greet a woman, don't you kiss her on the lips as we do here, or you'll get a knife through your guts. Only bow to her at first, and then, if she gives you your hand, you may kiss that. And don't you meddle with any married woman, not even if you *know* her husband's away from home. Nor with whores neither; they'll give you the pox. And maids at inns mostly have the pox as well, however fresh and pretty they may look to you."

"What about the nuns?" I asked.

"You mean to disguise yourself as a priest? I hope, Tom, you'll be too busy to look at the women at all. One more piece of advice. Keep off the Emperor's ground. He's grown so suspicious, he's ready to arrest any Englishman at sight."

It was now 1539. All the news we had of Reginald Pole, that summer, was that he had shut himself up in a monastery at Carpentras, within the Papal enclave of Avignon.

"That's what comes of clumsy attempts," Cromwell said. "We had an ambush waiting for him outside Toledo; he went there almost alone, to see the Emperor. But those cowards delayed; they thought it would be better after he left Toledo, and in the meantime they followed him everywhere, until even Reginald couldn't miss them. The Emperor gave him a bodyguard out of Toledo; they never left him till he came to Carpentras, which is a tricky place for us, being Church property. Still, he can't stay there for ever; his friends will want him back in Rome. Go there and see what you can find out."

It was arranged that I should write, not to my master, but to the goldsmith in Lombard Street, who kept my money. He would know, by a special mark on the seal, that the letter was to go unopened to Cromwell. I was to get my letters at a goldsmith's house in Marseilles, and money would be waiting for me there, too.

A wine merchant's vessel was leaving Southampton for Bordeaux in August. I went aboard with a passport in a false name, and a letter signed by the King, to say that I was a gentleman trying to trace a legacy from a cousin who had died abroad.

A sailor took my baggage to a cabin on the deck—a small place, but pleasant and airy. "There's only one other gentleman to share it with you," he said.

I protested: "But the captain promised I should have it to myself!"

As we were disputing the matter, the "other gentleman" came in. He was a most ungentlemanlike figure. Despite the heat, he wore a hood, which hid most of his face. A wispy beard hid more. But I knew him by his red nose.

"Beery Willey!" I said.

He nodded, looking at me sidelong. I glowered at him with equal suspicion. He had been missing from Cromwell's table some weeks. Had my master been preparing him in secret, to keep a watch on me? I dared not protest any longer against sharing the cabin with him. He might report that I had something to hide.

So I greeted Willey with a pretence of good fellowship, and told the sailor to fetch us a bottle of wine. He answered that there was ale aboard, but no wine. "If we had wine we wouldn't be sailing to France for it."

With ale, it took me some time to loosen Willey's tongue. I found out, in the end, that he thought *I* was there to watch *him*.

"And there's no need," he said. "Everybody knows my opinion. That's been my trouble all along—too open. If Mr. Cromwell—I beg his pardon, *Lord* Cromwell—tells me that he can't protect me any longer, that's one thing. But to try to catch me, to try to make me say . . ."

I got no more out of him then, because, once we had passed the Isle of Wight, he became seasick, and lay helpless,

groaning, all day. I felt not a tremor. Keeping my balance on the heaving deck was to me a sport, like riding a frisky horse. When the sullen sailor could not be found (which was most of the day) I looked after Willey, bringing clouts and buckets, mopping the floor as carefully as a woman. Towards evening, he began to recover.

"Always like this the first day at sea," he said. "Why did I trust myself to the old grey mare?" I had to hold the bucket for him again. "Ugh!" he said. "I should have stayed and let them burn me."

I laughed at him. "Who wants to burn you, then?"

Willey said: "You live in Cromwell's house, and you haven't heard of the Act of the Six Articles?"

"Oh, yes, that. Something about religion."

"Something about religion!" repeated Willey. He sat up. "I need a drink."

"No more ale," I said. "It'll make you worse."

"Water, then."

I took away the bucket and brought him water. And so, for the first time, I saw him cold sober. He was very ill-tempered.

"Something about religion!" he shouted at me. "What do you think, young high and mighty, what do you imagine *all this* has been about, if not about religion?"

"All what?"

"The quarrel with the Pope, the closing of the monasteries —everything that we've helped Cromwell do."

"We've made England a free country."

"Free from foreign domination—is that it? Yes? And *within* England? Within our own souls? Are you satisfied with our freedom?"

He had never been so talkative when he was drunk. Before I had time to reply, he was off again.

"If you're here to take down what I say, take this down. I believe in the dignity of man." (Here he vomited again.) "I

believe men are too good to be abbey louts and lubbers, gluttons in the open, sodomites in secret, endlessly chanting words they don't understand."

"Agreed."

"*You* agree! What have *you* done? You've helped to turn the monks out, but what have you put in their place? How do you think the new owners of the monasteries are going to treat the people?"

"They can't do worse than the monks."

"They can. They do. Where some lazy monk used to keep a sort of a school, the gentry keep no school at all. Where some great clumsy pregnant nun used to waddle between sick beds, *they* let the sick die in the streets. The monks ate half of what they should have given to the poor; the gentry take every scrap. I've seen it, all these weeks I've been in hiding. I've seen what it is, to be a poor man in England now. If the Brethren hadn't scraped the money together, to get me aboard and away, I might have died in a ditch. Agh!"

I brought him the bucket again, but he waved it aside, and suddenly asked: "Why should you look after me?"

"For my own sake," I said. "I have to sleep in this cabin. I want it clean."

"That's it!" said Willey. "How can a man enjoy his own house in peace, if there are stinking beggars on the doorstep, and starving children creeping in to steal? For his own sake, as you say, he should pay something towards almshouses and schools. I used to think that, once the monasteries were down, people would see charity as a matter of plain common sense. But they don't, Tom; they don't. We were mistaken about that. We've been mistaken about many things."

I asked: "What things?" But he mumbled that he wanted to sleep, and I was glad enough to climb into my own hammock. The boat swung me to and fro; I was never rocked so sweetly since my cradle days.

In the morning I found Willey already up, breakfasting cautiously on bread and water.

"One thing I cannot understand," he said. "How did Cromwell know I was on this ship?"

"He didn't know. I was assured I'd have this cabin to myself."

"Is it chance, then?" Willey asked, and answered his own question. "It *must* be chance. The Brethren didn't talk the captain round until an hour before we sailed. That we two should be together—that's the sort of chance the common people call God's will."

I said: "I'm glad you've got over your fancy that I was sent to spy on you. There are more important people—"

"For you to spy on? Oh, I know what your trade is. But who's your master?"

"You know who my master is."

"And I know who *his* master is. Old Harry. But who sits on old Harry's left shoulder, and whispers into his ear? The question is, Tom, have you and I been doing God's work? Or the Devil's?"

"I hope God's."

"You hope? That's how I found the Brethren in Southampton—full of hope. They could not be convinced, at first, that I had any need to go abroad. 'Sir Thomas More is dead, who was our greatest persecutor.' How could I persuade them that their good Lord Cromwell—Cromwell, who put the English Bibles in the churches—was going to be a greater persecutor still?"

That infuriated me. I shouted: "That's nonsense!" Willey did not answer. And while the echoes of my own voice died away, I heard, as it were, the echoes of my master's words: "Do you think that His Grace is a Lutheran? Married priests, indeed!"

"Perhaps," I said, "he has difficulty in persuading the King"

"Perhaps he has," Willey agreed. "And perhaps, to avoid such difficulty, he does not try to persuade the King of anything that His Grace does not already want to do. Tell me—why do you think Lambert was burned?"

"Lambert? Wasn't he mixed up with some Anabaptists?"

"And Anabapists, of course, are not men and women. They want to share out the goods of the gentry among the poor. All right. I'll try something you *do* understand. Tell me what evidence you know of the guilt of Anne Boleyn."

I looked over my shoulder.

"Oh, look round!" Willey said. "Look under the deck and up in the rigging for spies. Take your time. And then tell me what makes you think Anne Boleyn was guilty."

I shouted: "Why did you suddenly ask me that? I thought we were talking about our country—not about one woman."

"Oh! I beg your pardon," said Willey, "for mentioning only one woman. But you see, Tom, the English law used to be that you could not take even one woman's life when you were tired of her. And for a good reason. If one woman's life is not safe, no more is mine. Nor yours, Tom. Nor our master's. Cromwell may have reason, one day, to wish that England were still ruled by laws."

I argued that Anne Boleyn's execution had been according to law. The House of Lords had found her guilty of high treason.

"They may do the same to Cromwell," Willey said. "The law can do anything, if you twist it as hard as that. Today I'm in danger of being burned for heresy, because Cromwell's forced the Act of the Six Articles through Parliament, and made it a crime to believe what he believes himself. Tomorrow you'll be in danger for doing what Cromwell himself has told you to do. And serve us both right. We've helped to make England a tyranny. You and I, Tom, have been the willing tools of a tyrant."

When he saw how angry I was at that, he ordered the

sailor to bring us up some ale. "You mustn't mind what I say when I'm sober," he told me. "Water confuses my tongue."

We spent the following week more pleasantly, Willey being drunk on ale, and I on the delight of being at sea. The great white sails bellying above my head, the swift clambering of the boys up in the rigging, the talk of the sailors who told me the native port of each passing ship—all this was almost as wonderful to me as my first sight of France.

When we shortened sail, and moved slowly, slowly up the Gironde, I saw what I had never seen—grapes growing on the vine. There were fields of wheat, too; it was taller than our wheat, and it was already being harvested. (When we left England the grain had scarcely begun to turn colour.)

And amid all this abundance moved peasants wearing rags, barefoot or in wooden shoes. Soon we were so near the bank that we could see their haggard, greyish faces.

"How is it they're so poor?" I asked.

Willey said: "They have wars here."

"There you are!" I whispered to him. "If the King were not so careful to put down every sign of treason, our people would be just as miserable."

Willey whispered back: "That sort of reasoning lulled my conscience to sleep, this many a long year!"

I could hardly do without Willey, once we landed. The people could understand me, when I spoke the French of the courtly romances. But I could not understand what they said in reply. It was Willey who spoke the dialect of the South. Willey found me an inn without fleas, and changed my money to French money, and bargained on my behalf when I bought a horse.

"Which way will you be riding?" he asked me.

I said cautiously: "Towards Toulouse."

He took me round the inns, inquiring for parties of merchants who might be going that way. "You must have

company," he said. "You'll never reach Toulouse alone, with only your sword and your dagger. French highway robbers have guns."

In our tour of the inns we revelled in the cheap abundant wine. I treated Willey to all he could hold since he was doing so much for me. By the time we had found a party of merchants, and persuaded them to take me with them, Willey was swaying gently to and fro with every word he spoke. The sight comforted me. Since he was nothing but a drunkard, I need not think seriously about what he said.

I offered him money for his own journey. He took it, but then said: "God grant I never need it! There are Brethren enough in this town. They'll find me a post as a tutor to some pale, sneaking French boy."

And he left me, with scarcely a farewell. He had not once asked why I wanted to go to Toulouse.

The next morning, ambling slowly with the merchants, I passed by rich vineyards, noble churches, and miserable people. At noonday we stopped at an inn. There was plenty of cheap wine—raw, fiery stuff, which did not quench my thirst. When I asked for water, the innkeeper's wife stared, shrugged, and brought me some at last. But when I asked for butter to put on my bread, she began a shrill, clattering tirade, of which I did not understand one word. One of the merchants told her that I was English. At that she made a gesture of bringing down a chopper on the back of her own neck, and everybody burst out laughing. This was how I first learned that every foreigner thought it a laughing matter, that the King of England had cut off his wife's head.

Perhaps it was the water that made me ill. When we reached the gates of Toulouse I saw the stone sway before me, and I knew nothing more until I came to in a convent. "Some great clumsy pregnant nun," as Willey had said, was feeling my brow.

My money was gone. But they told me, in civilised French,

not to fret; it was safe with the Mother Superior. Soon this lady appeared, and said she had counted my money; that was how she knew that I could afford a room to myself. Did I wish to be moved to the common ward? I said I would stay where I was; I liked the soft clean bed.

I liked it better still when I had somewhat recovered, and a pretty young nun took to climbing in beside me. "Vows?" she said. "What vows? My aunt and uncle brought me here by force, because they couldn't take the trouble to find me a husband. What you're *made* to vow doesn't count." Just as in England . . . Yet this was a good hospital, and I got well there.

When I left, the Mother Superior presented me with my reckoning. I was surprised to find that she charged extra for the nights when the pretty nun had shared my bed.

"We need this money to repair our chapel," the Mother Superior said. "And for the greater glory of God. You are not denying that Sister Angélique . . . "

I said: "I thought she was doing it for love."

"Ah, oui, l'amour . . . " said the Mother Superior, taking my money.

The nuns had taken good care of my horse, and I soon overtook another party riding eastwards. As we neared Nîmes they proudly showed me the great aqueduct, which the Romans built to bring clean water to the South of France.

"If you French had kept it in order," I said, "I should not have spent the last six weeks in a fever."

I told them that in London we had conduits bringing clean water into the city, and that rich men had taps inside their very houses. (Which they could hardly believe.) I ought to have admitted that our villages have ponds and wells as dirty as theirs. But I wanted to get my own back, as an Englishman, for their continual jokes about chopping off women's heads.

At Nîmes, when I stood in the Roman amphitheatre, my pride abated. I knew I was a barbarian. Other barbarians

had been there before me, taking the stones to build a fortress for their wars. Yet the place kept the form the Romans gave it, and this form, this order, was a new thing to me. In England, as in France, if you mean to ride fast, you must ride on a Roman road. Wherever the rain has washed the mud away, a stone laid by a Roman rings under the hoof. Once, in the distance, I saw the ruins of Hadrian's wall. But our country has none of the great buildings made by the Romans when they were at peace.

In this amphitheatre, I tried to fancy what it would be like to see a play. Not the sort of thing Beery Willey wrote, but a real play, lasting for hours, unfolding a whole romance . . . Men had time for such things in that lost world of peace and order, where they obeyed one ruler and spoke one tongue. If only the barbarians had known what they were doing, when they first raised their hands against that unity!

By the road, outside the theatre, stood a beggar who seemed the epitome of our own barbarous age. He was on crutches, and his clothes were in rags, his shoes falling off his feet; but his helmet and breastplate were in order, and so was the arquebus he carried on his back. The strangest thing about him was that he begged in Spanish.

"Have mercy on a poor soldier wounded by Christians!"

I said in Spanish: "Surely you mean wounded by Turks?"

"Not exactly, sir," said the beggar. "It's true I was in the Emperor's army, and we were told we were going to fight the Turk. But when we came to the mountains of Austria, the peasants wouldn't give us anything to eat. They said they'd rather have the Turks than us. Some of our men were angry. They did things which . . . Well, sir, the end of it was, the peasants hid in the mountains, and came down on us at night. They dug pits in the road, and covered them over with brushwood, so that we'd fall in. Or they felled trees across the road, and while we were shifting the tree, the peasants would be firing on us from the forest. So that's how I got

this wound here, in the thigh. You see it *was* through fighting in the Emperor's wars. That is, against the Emperor's Christian subjects. The Emperor gave me a licence to beg my way back to Spain. And he let me keep my arquebus."

"So you can use that," I said, "to shoot yourself a partridge or a rabbit."

"Oh, no, sir! An arquebus is no good against a moving target. It comes handy for frightening the peasants, and making them give me food. But by the time I've balanced it on my crutch, and loaded it, and taken aim–why, bless you, sir, if I *hit* anything, it would be the will of God."

I gave him a larger coin than he deserved. As I was turning away to avoid his thanks, I heard something which made me turn again.

"I knew I should be lucky, when I had the English Cardinal's blessing!"

I said: "The English Cardinal blessed you? When?"

"A week ago, when he rode out of Carpentras, on his way to Italy."

"Are you sure?"

"No . . . No, it was ten days ago I saw him with his train. That was something to see, sir; the Bishop of Carpentras rode out with *his* train, to say farewell to the Cardinal. Crying like a child!"

"Who was crying?"

"The Bishop, sir. The Cardinal never weeps. They say he's a saint. The best man that ever lived, and the most generous to the poor. He gave me something, sir, as he went by, and his blessing, to take me safe back to Spain."

It was useless, then, to go to Carpentras. I went to Marseilles and collected the money awaiting me at the goldsmith's. I also collected a letter. Cromwell wrote that the King was to marry a German princess, the Lady Anne of Cleves. There was a footnote. "Tell Michael that his brother is in the Tower."

The goldsmith said that Cardinal Pole had gone to Venice, where he had a house on the Grand Canal. If I were to follow him by land, I should soon find myself among rough and asper mountains. Besides, the mountains belonged to the Emperor.

A quicker way was by ship to Genoa. From there, by the low hills and the plains, I could ride in less than a week across Italy. But Genoa, too, belonged to the Emperor.

In the harbour at Marseilles I found a Venetian vessel, which traded with all the ports in Italy, and would return at last to Venice. The captain was very willing to take a passenger, and told me the name of a good inn at Venice. I sent this address to Mr. Cromwell, adding: "I keep in mind your warning not to cross the Emperor's territory."

Having sold my horse, I set sail. When I found how slowly the ship made its way from port to port (doubling back sometimes, when the captain had in view some profitable trade) I thought I ought to land at Ostia, and make my way northwards through the Papal States. I had always wanted to see Rome. But the Pope might, like the Emperor, be in a mood to arrest any Englishman.

Besides, if I stayed on the ship, I should see Naples and Palermo, and perhaps Corfu. So, in a sunlit dream, I stayed aboard, revelling in the delights that each day brought.

Since I was never seasick, I could help to man the pumps, or keep a look-out, and soon the captain and crew were treating me as a friend. I talked to them at first in the Italian I had learned (which they called Toscana) but soon they taught me the Venetian dialect, which is almost another language. The towns where we put in, besides their other wonders, had bookshops better than any of ours in London. I never left a port without a new Italian book to read. So I learned more every day, and felt virtuous to think how well I had prepared myself for life in Venice.

When we had rounded Sicily a storm began to blow, and blew so hard that we had no choice but to run before it, eastwards and still eastwards, one mast broken, half our sails torn, salt water pounding us, and our fresh water almost gone. In the midst of all this the captain was more calm than a saint made of marble. Day after day he told us that we should soon come to Crete—"a good place to spend the winter." At last one of his officers muttered behind his back: "So it will be, if it hasn't been taken by the Turk."

At these words I saw myself in a great naval battle, riding out the gunfire as I had learned to ride the storm, giving orders to the crew as the captain fell, leading the first rush of the attackers aboard an infidel galley . . .

But when we sighted Crete a cheer went up. The flag on the ramparts was the lion of St. Mark.

We berthed at Candia. Some of the sailors kissed the ground. I did not; I could not spare a moment from looking at the city. I had by now seen many beautiful cities—or, rather, cities with beautiful buildings rising out of their filthy streets. But here everything—ramparts, churches, houses—formed part of one design. It was not like the designs made by the Romans; many of the houses were fantasticated with curlicues of stone. Yet the place was the work of men with Roman minds, who believed in peace and order. This was the first Venetian colony I had seen.

I was made welcome there, for I still had a great deal of money. My clothes being spoiled with sea water, I found a tailor to make me clothes in the Venetian fashion. Their woollen stuffs were not as good as ours, but their silks dazzled me. They were cheap, too, and abundant; the Turkish merchants brought them from Constantinople. So I was dressed well enough when the Governor of the island invited me to dine.

He asked me what I thought of the town and I said, with truth, that it was the most splendid I had ever seen.

The Governor smiled, and said: "You have not seen Venice."

I remarked that I had been surprised to find so many Turks there. These infidels, against whom I had imagined myself battling, were peacefully selling sweetmeats in the market place. On my first evening in Candia, while the Angelus rang for the Christians, I had been distracted from my own prayers by the sight of brown men bowing towards Mecca.

"We have to allow this," the Governor explained. "They do the same for our merchants in Constantinople. All through the Turkish Empire Christians are allowed to practise their own faith, so long as they do not try to convert Moslems. You know, of course, that the Turks honour Christ as a prophet. Only they deny he was the son of God. They honour Moses, too; that's why they get on so well with the Jews."

Every word he said made me ashamed of my own ignorant and barbarous prejudices. Yet surely I was not alone in feeling them? "I seem to remember," I said, "that the Pope once forbade all Christian countries to trade with the Turks."

"Oh, the Pope!" exclaimed the Governor. I saw round me contemptuously smiling faces, just as at Cromwell's table when anyone mentioned the Pope. "That's one point where we can all agree with your King—in telling the Holy Father to mind his own business. He's already ruined our slave trade! All the slaves in the Mediterranean are carried on Turkish vessels—as if that made them any better off!"

At this dinner we all solemnly rose to drink to the Venetian Republic. Some of those present had tears in their eyes. Again I felt my ignorance; I had not known that a republic could be loved. In compliment to me they drank to the King of England, and I had tears in my own eyes. But then, suddenly, I thought that a Republic would not have a running sore on its leg.

Later, when I dined with the officers of the garrison, I found these gentlemen thinking only of the day when they would see Venice again. They were all amazed to hear that I liked Crete. I did not, they said, know the vileness of the Greek peasants and fishermen.

I said I thought them beautiful, worthy to be descendants of King Minos.

They told me not to think of such old fairy tales, and never to call the Greeks beautiful—especially not their women. "If you so much as kiss a Greek woman," one of them said, "she'll be stoned to death by her own kinsfolk. Death for adultery or the suspicion of adultery—that's their custom. They learned it from the Turks."

"Or perhaps," murmured one man, "from the English." I pretended not to hear.

Since the Greek women dared not go near a Venetian, the officers imported their own courtesans from Venice. A fresh boat-load arrived while I was there. The officers gave a feast for them. Most of the girls had been taught to play the lute, and to sing, so we were well entertained. Besides, it was pleasant for me to sit among women again. The Venetians hide their wives and daughters away, almost like Turks. I had been presented to the Governor's wife, but she had not dined with us. And when I saw Venetian women in the market, they were so well guarded by their servants that it was impossible to speak to them.

At this feast, I had the privilege of a guest, to sit beside the courtesan considered the most beautiful. I thought she might, perhaps, have been beautiful, if she had left her hair black. But it was dyed a red-gold colour, and her face was powdered to a fairness which went strangely with eyes as black as Anne Boleyn's.

Since I did not wish to seem ungracious to my hosts, I put my right arm round her waist, and slid my left hand under her skirt.

Here I encountered an obstacle. She was wearing something that felt like a man's doublet, but it—they—came down to her knees.

She murmured something about "the new fashion", and then: "Well, they keep me warm."

A strange garment was for me a new excitement . . . Here I could begin to boast, as old bachelors do, not lying, but leaving out more than half the truth.

Because the truth is fear—fear of entanglement, fear of the woman's pregnancy if she is not married, fear of her husband's vengeance if she is. And above all the fear of the pox. Cromwell was right there; in each port of France and Italy I had seen more faces eaten away by that "Indian measles" than I had seen in England all my life.

A man cannot always be starving for fear of poison, and I *did* have Italian women, and some were beautiful. But there was not one like Margaret, never one who offered to tramp the roads beside me.

In Crete I spent more time with horses than with women, keeping the officers company as they rode on patrol, in the mild sunlit air. Sometimes a cold wind would blow, and they would complain of the winter, which made me smile, In January the spring flowers began to appear.

When a fast warship was about to sail for Venice, I asked permission to travel on it. But the Governor told me that this was forbidden to all but officers of the Republic. The ship, however, carried a letter from me to Cromwell. I explained that I had been shipwrecked and was delayed.

There were merchant ships, on which I could have travelled, but I did not give them a thought. I settled down to wait, while the great Candia shipyard repaired the vessel on which I had arrived. And then, slowly, slowly, through a warm, sweet spring, stopping at every Venetian colony on the coast of Illyria, we made our way northwards at last.

The sea-path to Venice is by a low green island, where they

grow melons, called the Lido. Towards the north end of it there is a huddle of houses, and a church. The captain pointed it out to me as the place where the Doge goes to Mass once a year, after he has thrown his ring into the sea.

At the end of the Lido we sailed past a fortress, through the one channel into the Lagoon. And here the haze of the summer morning lay so thick that I could see nothing, except the still water through which we passed. Then the sun began to break through.

"There's the tower of St. Mark," the captain said.

And I was ready to believe all the travellers' tales, to believe in Lost Atlantis, and men who eat other men, and the great wall of Cathay. There may be unicorns, as there is Venice.

It came floating to us through the mist, and when the mist dissolved it did not fade. It had quays of solid stone, and there were men on the quays, and they caught our great ropes, and we landed.

And it was only then, with paving stones beneath my feet, and a porter carrying my baggage to the inn, that I forgot the wonder of mere travelling, and thought about the purpose of my journey. I dreaded the letters that waited for me at the inn.

There were two. In the first, Cromwell chided me gently for travelling by sea at a stormy time of year, when (besides the danger) I should be much delayed. But he said I should find more money waiting for me at the Banca Giro on the Rialto.

The second letter, dated April 1540, said: "His Grace has done me the great honour of making me Earl of Essex." (So much, I thought, for Willey's fears.) "He is the most gracious prince alive, and would be glad to reward you, if you would shake off your sluggishness, and proceed."

Shake off your sluggishness . . . It was July, 1540, almost a year since I had left England.

And at last I let myself acknowledge the truth. I had delayed because I wanted to delay. I could not bear what I was going to do.

Yet, still obedient to my distant master, I asked the way to the Rialto.

"Sempre diretto," said the innkeeper, and pointed into a maze of alley ways, where I could not possibly go straight ahead.

I was glad of every turning, of every alley which led me to the back of some old house, where little boats bobbed, and a woman was throwing rubbish into a canal. Doubling on my tracks, I came suddenly into the Square of St. Mark, only a little way from where the ship had berthed.

All the haze had gone. The Turks, the Tartars, the Negroes and the Moors were clear in the light of that clear morning. They had come, I suppose, to trade; yet they seemed to be doing nothing but revel in Venice. I looked where they looked, at the Tower, at the Basilica, but I could not see what they saw. Arches, domes and pinnacles were swimming in a red mist of murder. Stamped on the very walls I found the image of the man I did not want to kill.

And yet I went on; I found the Rialto. The banker whispered: "Isn't this the money from Lord Cromwell?"

"Yes," I whispered back. "But it should not be said in public. You understand?"

He nodded, very gravely. Then he spent some time in whispering to another man.

"All is well!" he said at last. "The money is here. He must have sent it . . . earlier."

I was so glad to have my purse well filled again that I did not ask what he meant.

I stood on the Rialto bridge, lulling the surface of my mind with idle thoughts. Why did a city so magnificent have such a poor wooden bridge? Could they not see that they

needed a stone one? I watched a funeral, in black boats, wailing its way along the Grand Canal, and wondered where these crowded islanders buried their dead.

And all the time I knew what I should be doing. Reginald Pole had a palace on the Grand Canal. Surely a Cardinal's house would have some outward sign? I had no need to ask, only to hire a gondola, and float quietly along until I found the place. Since my clothes were Venetian, I should not be known as a stranger.

Yet, when a gondolier came to beg for my custom, I shook my head. I told myself that he had a cut-throat's face. (What other face would suit a gondolier?) While I stood hesitating, I heard a voice call me, in my own tongue and by my real name.

"My English friend—Mr. Vaughan! My dear English friend! I met you in the house of your master, Mr. Cromwell!"

I stared into a face I did not recognise, and thought that if there were any words I did not wish to hear spoken aloud in Italy, they were: "Your master, Mr. Cromwell . . ." But thank God! I thought; nobody here can understand.

"I shall always remember how kind you were to me," the voice went on. "You took me to a tailor in Cheapside—do you remember? I still have all those fine clothes! I put them on once a year, on Ascension Day, when the Doge casts his ring into the sea."

At the thought of the fine clothes, the stranger hunched his shoulders beneath his shabby gown. I knew him then—Marco Rafael, the baptised Jew who had come to see King Henry.

"I'm glad the clothes have lasted so well," I said.

"Ah! But they'll last for ever—they're English wool! Like the English beef I ate in your master's house—the best in all the world. What a wonderful country! What a happy time that was! I'm afraid I disappointed your master; my

exposition of the Hebrew texts was not what the King wanted to hear. And yet, when Mr. Cromwell saw me off, he was as kind to me as ever. I shall never be able to think of him without weeping."

And indeed he was weeping, there, on the Rialto Bridge. I did not know what to say, until he wiped his eyes and went on: "May I make some little return—may I invite you to my own poor house?"

I was glad to get away from this public place, for, when he began to weep, Marco had abandoned his English and gone over to Italian.

Marco's house was little and dark and crumbling, and stuffed with books. But a pleasant smell of cooking mingled with the canal smells. Soon a dinner of pasta was brought to us by the Jew's wife. She was not young or pretty, but her hair was by nature the colour that the dyed harlots aim at. He said proudly: "This is Giulietta."

Being a modest Venetian wife, Giulietta did not sit down with us. But before she withdrew to the kitchen she asked me if I were in Venice to trade.

"No," I said, "I have no business here but to walk about and wonder why I have not lived here all my life."

Marco looked at me rather timidly and said: "I was afraid you might have come here on some errand of Mr. Cromwell's."

I said: "I left his service long ago." To make this more likely I added: "For reasons of religion."

"Thank God!" said Marco. "Then he has not brought you down in his fall."

I repeated: "Fall?"

"Did you not know? Mr. Cromwell has fallen."

"But you must be mistaken. He has never been in higher favour. The King has just made him Earl of Essex."

"That was two or three months ago," Marco said. "Today a party of English merchants came to the Rialto. That's why

I was there; they sent for me to interpret. The merchants told me that, just before they sailed, Cromwell was arrested where he sat, at the head of the King's Privy Council. He is in the Tower for high treason."

I still insisted it could not be true.

"Oh, these merchants could hardly believe it," Marco said. "The first anybody knew of it, in the City, was when soldiers of the King's bodyguard appeared at Cromwell's house. They declared that the house and everything in it was forfeit to the King."

"Your merchants are telling you a pack of lies!" I said. "We have laws in England, and judges, and courts. A man's goods *are* forfeit for treason–but not until he's been tried and found guilty."

"It seems that this was just the unfortunate part. You see, just before this happened, Mr. Cromwell had persuaded Parliament to pass a law that a person accused of treason should not be allowed to speak in his own defence. They say this was directed against Lady Salisbury. You've heard of her? The mother of Cardinal Pole. It seems that she is a very eloquent lady. Well, when Cromwell was arrested at the council table, he cried out to all the Dukes and Earls, who had been bowing to him a moment before, to bear witness that he was not a traitor. And . . . And they all reminded him that he was not allowed to speak in his own defence. I am afraid . . ." Marco's voice dropped, "he did not find one friend there. They all taunted him with the laws he had made. The Duke of Norfolk spat insults into his face. And the same day Parliament passed a law, to say that he was a traitor. So you see, there was no trial."

I knew now that Marco was telling the truth. He was telling it with grief, with shame, because he had loved England. He felt as I did the disgrace of having a barbarous tyrant for king.

I put my head into my hands, and wept aloud.

"Forgive me!" said Marco. "I should have told you of this more gently."

He and Giulietta bustled round me, patting my shoulders, offering me wine. They did not think it strange it should be weeping. Marco had known Cromwell as I had first known him, as a generous, witty, civilised man.

"But you know," Marco said, "what he was doing—it was not right for England. Though I loved him just as you did, though I wanted to help him, I could not bring myself to twist the words of Scripture for his purpose. He loved Italy; he loved our art and our poetry; and because of this he tried to bring into England the worst vices of the small Italian states. The flattery of a tyrant, the twisting of laws to suit the tyrant's most base desires . . . For example, this business of sending assassins . . . Oh, I know that we do it here! If any cunning craftsman tries to take Venetian secrets into Florence, he is followed and killed. This is wrong, but with us it's an old custom, hard to root out. How much more wrong, then, to bring in the custom where it was never known! Besides, the man Cromwell has been trying to kill is the best and most learned of Englishmen, the man all Europe adores as a saint—Cardinal Pole. Forgive me! Perhaps you did not know this? It was been the talk of Venice, this long time."

I could not answer; I could only weep. Marco's gentle voice was mingling in my mind with other voices, with Willey's taunts, with Katherine's dying words: "Who is to forgive the harm you do your own soul?"

And still I struggled; still I would not accept the lesson that my life was teaching me. It was too simple, not worthy of my subtile mind.

Suddenly I heard a woman's voice. The voice of Katherine? The voice of my mother? It called softly, in Spanish: "Son! Son, are you there?"

I was so sure I heard it that I almost answered aloud. But

as I raised my head and looked about me, Marco said in Spanish: "Yes, mother, I am coming." To me he murmured: "Excuse me for a moment." Then he went into the kitchen. Besides this kitchen, and the room I sat in, there were no other rooms on the ground floor of the house. The doors had been left open, because of the heat.

So I heard all the conversation. Indeed, Marco and his mother did not lower their voices. Evidently they supposed that nobody near them understood Spanish.

"Mother," said Marco, "say something to my wife."

"What can I say to her, son? She is your wife. I wish her no harm."

"Sit down, then, mother, and drink some wine with her. The wine is not—" There followed a word I did not know.

"No, son; I prefer to stand. I must go at once. It is bad enough for me, when they even suspect I have been here. You cannot believe the spiteful things they say in the Synagogue. Señora Alvarez said to me only this morning: 'So your son goes to the Doge's palace now. He's rising in the world,' she said. 'But you know what happens to those who rise too fast.' I told her you'd never in your life been to the Doge's Palace."

"But I have, mother. I was there yesterday. The Doge had some Spanish visitors. I interpreted for him."

"Spaniards! You interpreted for Spaniards! Oh God! Son, son, why couldn't you tell me it wasn't true?"

Though I could follow these words, I could not make sense of them. It had never once entered my head that a Jewish woman could be anything but glad and proud to know that her son was accepted among Christians.

I caught a glimpse of the old woman as she left; a white face under a mantilla, a face marked by grief, like Katherine's.

Marco came back and said: "Forgive me. I could

not present you to my mother, she speaks only Spanish."

I said: "Forgive me. I should have told you I understand Spanish."

Marco shrugged his shoulders. "Then you know. Well! You already knew I was born a Jew." He smiled. " 'With a bloody mark on my chest.' My mother and father were driven out of Spain, robbed, starved, pursued by pirates—all because of a very pious couple, Ferdinand and Isabella."

I asked the question I should not have thought of asking, a year before. "Why did you turn Christian?"

Marco said: "Not for the reason they think at the Synagogue—to escape from the ghetto and rise in the world. Not for the reason my mother thinks—to marry Giulietta. Giulietta does indeed shine brighter than the light on the road to Damascus." As she brought us more wine, he smiled at this plump woman of forty, as if she were some great beauty. "But in fact, I was already converted; I saw her in church." He paused. "How can I explain this to you? You were baptised, carried into church . . . From the time you could speak, you never heard there was any other religion. Perhaps you think no more of it than we think of living in Venice. But just as a stranger coming to Venice will stand and stare, so I, as a young man, stood and stared at the Christian faith. I thought—these Christians don't understand what a treasure they trample every day under their feet. Consider! Every civilised man of our time regrets having lived too late for the Roman Empire. It is a great thing that Venice rules a quarter of that Empire. But how much greater it is that one voice on earth can tell Venice: 'Humble your pride; empty your bulging purses; you must not trade in slaves!' Though it speaks too slowly, though it speaks too late, there will be one voice to say the same to Spain and Portugal. Just as there was one voice on earth to tell your King: 'Take back your innocent wife; restore your daughter to her rights!' "

I said: "But you can't believe that the Church of Rome, as it is—"

"Oh, not as it is, but as it might be! As it *will* be, if Cardinal Pole gets his way."

So, for the first time, I learned that Cardinal Pole was famous for his desire to reform the church from within. With two other Cardinals, he had drawn up a report on Rome's abuses. Marco showed it to me, and pointed out some of Pole's most vehement words on the excessive privileges of the Popes, on their constant abuse of their powers to make money, on the diversion of church revenues to the support of unworthy people. All this, being in Latin, was for the learned alone; but still I did not understand how it could have been printed.

"There's the difference between our Pope and your King!" Marco said. "Both asked the Cardinal for his advice; both begged him to put all his thoughts in writing. Pope Paul III really wanted this advice; he thanked the Cardinal for it, and had it published at once. What your King did with Pole's advice you know."

I said I thought the King might have taken it better, if Pole had not reminded him of his past mistresses. And even if the King had borne such rebukes, he could not be expected to bear the suggestion that the Emperor ought to invade England.

"Did the Cardinal really say that?" asked Marco. "Have you yourself read this book?"

I assured him I had—and only too late thought that I had given myself away. Since the book addressed to the King had never been printed, I could only have read the manuscript, and that by the King's permission. But Marco's thoughts were taking another tack.

"The Cardinal is a strange man," he said. "He has often sent for me to help him understand some difficult passage of the Old Testament. His goodness, his gentleness, his eagerness to learn—all these are real. And the last time I met

him, when I saw how nobly he bore the suffering inflicted on him through this terrible persecution of his family, then I thought the common people might well be right in calling him a saint. And yet... Perhaps because he himself is free from so many human weaknesses, he seems not to understand the feelings of other people. For example, though he knows I am a Jew, he says angry things about 'Jewish moneylenders'. Not, I am sure, with any thought of hurting me; there is no malice in his nature. Last time I saw him I ventured to remark that Venetian moneylenders charge the same interest as Jews. And he said: 'Yes, alas, there are Christians as bad as Jews.' Not long ago I heard him talking to his great friend, Cardinal Bembo, about the wickedness of churchmen who keep mistresses. Everyone in Italy, except Cardinal Pole, knows that Bembo has a mistress and three children. But Pole, though he has often stayed in Bembo's house, has never noticed this family of his. How can a man be so learned, and have so little knowledge of the human heart?"

"Surely, then," I said, "he must have offended many people."

"Oh, yes! And yet almost everyone forgives him. Indeed they find they cannot do without him. That's why the Pope has begged him to come back to Rome."

Back to Rome... I had spent a whole afternoon in talking to Marco, while perhaps already... "When does he go?" I asked.

"Oh, he went a fortnight ago."

"I have kept you from your books too long," I said, and rose to my feet with an air of cheerfulness. Then I suddenly began to weep again.

"My dear friend!" said Marco. "Do not go out in this heat! You look so pale... Come upstairs and rest. It is only down here we are a little cramped; our top room is quite pleasant and airy."

He led me up two flights of stairs, past the bedroom of himself and his wife, to another bedroom directly above. It was indeed more airy; along the narrow alleys a faint breeze blew in from the lagoon. The room was plain and paved with tiles, but the bed hangings were of silk.

"This is our son's room," said Marco. "He makes little use of it now; he is at the University of Padua. Lie down, my dear Mr. Vaughan; you have worn yourself out, weeping for your old master. You cannot help him now, unless with prayer. Lie down and rest."

So I did. But no sooner had I fallen asleep than I started awake again. *You cannot help him now.* But was this true? Might it not be more true that I had brought this trouble on him, by my sluggish delay? And could I not help him, even now, if I were to accomplish a stroke so brilliant that it would prove Cromwell right in trusting me?

The thought would not let me rest. I said farewell to Marco, and went back to the inn. The innkeeper agreed to look after my heavy baggage. Before evening I was at Fusina on the mainland, and had bought a horse.

And, as I had not seen Venice, I did not see Bologna, or Florence, or the Tuscan Alps between. Pushing on blindly, I took the risk of highway robbers, yet I did not meet any. Perhaps I went too fast for them.

But, when I was urging my tired horse to reach Siena by nightfall, I became aware of a horseman following me. I quickened my pace, and so did he. I spurred my horse again; the poor worn-out creature stumbled, and the other man caught up with me. He said in English: "Trying to make up for lost time?"

It was "Thomas Crumvell, thought to be a kinsman." He was fatter than before, and redder in the face, and much more sumptuously dressed. He smiled at me, and that smile made the sweat run coldly down my spine.

"Were you sent to look for me?" I asked.

"No," he said, still smiling. "That is–it's not my main concern. We did wonder if you were still with us."

"I suppose," I said, "that when you say 'we' you mean 'I and my King' as Wolsey used to say."

He took this seriously. "Yes," he said. "His Grace was good enough to take me into his service, after the treason of Lord Cromwell was discovered."

I asked: "Is our old master dead?"

"Yes, he was beheaded at Tyburn, a few days before I left. Made a very good end."

We rode side by side into Siena, silently. When we were settled at an inn, eating what Crumvell called "some of this foreign slobber", I asked him the cause of our master's fall.

"Some say it was his punishment for arranging this marriage with Anne of Cleves. The King never could fancy her. God knows why. Fine fat rump on her, and she couldn't nag him–didn't speak enough English. Once the divorce was agreed to, Cromwell did as much as anyone to help him get it. But I suppose by then it was too late."

"Divorce?"

"Yes; Archbishop Cranmer found some grounds or other. And you know what? This Anne of Cleves didn't let out so much as a squeak. Living by herself at Richmond Palace, as happy as all birds in the air. You'd think she was pleased to be divorced from the King."

"Who's the next one going to be?" I asked.

"Going to be? She is already. A young girl, Katherine Howard."

"Howard . . . She must be related to the Duke of Norfolk."

"Yes, his niece."

"Will he spit in *her* face," I murmured, "when her time comes?"

"What's that?"

"Is it true," I asked aloud, "that the Duke of Norfolk spat in Cromwell's face?"

"I daresay. Once he was known as a traitor."

"But what had he done?"

"Done? Well, you know old Cromwell—greedy as a Jew. Whatever he had, he wanted a little bit more. Besides that huge house in Stepney, he was rebuilding his house in the City, twice the size. You remember, years ago, the Austin Friars let him have half their part of the building. That wasn't enough; he turned them out altogether. And then he fancied Throgmorton House in Throgmorton Street. So he took it. Simply took it. It belonged to Sir George Throgmorton—you know, Michael Throgmorton's brother—and he was in the Tower, accused of treason, so what could he do? Only what Cromwell forgot was that Sir George Throgmorton's wife had a niece, Katherine Parr."

"You mean Lady Latimer? The pious gospelling lady?"

"That's her! I'm surprised Cromwell forgot her. He used to laugh at her sometimes—call her 'the miracle', because she had an old husband, and no lover. The King thinks the world of Katherine Parr; she helps to teach his daughters Latin. She was the only one who dared go to the King, and tell him about Throgmorton House. Because it wasn't according to law, you see. Sir George Throgmorton hadn't been found guilty; and if they *did* find him guilty his property would go to the King. So it looked as if Cromwell were stealing from the King. And that was only the beginning! While she was going about in her quiet way, Katherine Parr had been making notes of other cases. 'Cromwell has taken this, and this, and this.' The King looked into it and found it was all true. Because, once they found Cromwell wasn't in the King's favour, people dared to tell the truth about him. Before Cromwell had time to turn round, he was *in* the Tower, and Sir George Throgmorton was *out*."

"Sir George Throgmorton's free?"

"Yes, of course. Katherine Parr convinced the King he was innocent."

I burst out: "Then I can't—" and checked myself too late.

Crumvell smiled. "Oh, you can't make Michael Throgmorton do the job. Not for fear of what will happen to his brother. That plan was never any good. As the King says: 'If you want a thing done, do it yourself.' Those were his very words to me."

"Then you're here for—"

"For the very same reason as you, I hope. I may as well tell you—the King had some doubts of you. He thought Cromwell had done wrong to send you, your father and mother being dead."

I said: "And I haven't a brother His Grace can put in the Tower."

My voice had a sharper edge than I intended. Crumvell blinked doubtfully at me. "Oh, that's not your fault. And even if you had . . . Michael Throgmorton wouldn't budge when his brother was in the Tower. There were other people sent to him besides you. Michael's heart and soul for the Cardinal, whatever he may have told Cromwell."

I said: "Then I may as well go back to England."

Crumvell smiled and whispered: "I wouldn't if I were you."

I said nothing. He went on: "Because, as things are . . ." And then suddenly: "Go back when you've done something to clear your name."

"When I've helped you to do the job?"

He smiled. "It's lucky I met you. Lucky for both of us. You can be a big help to me, knowing the lingo. And I can tell the King how much you helped me. His Grace has a very forgiving nature, you know. All this time and money you've wasted—that'll be clean forgotten, if you come home with something to show at last."

He told me what he meant to do. The Cardinal was probably not yet at Rome; it was his custom to stop at Orvieto, and spend a few days there. "He has to

meet a lady friend in a convent," said Crumvell, leering.

"You must be mistaken," I said. "The common people call him a saint. To their way of thinking, that means a man who can live without women."

"Oh, I don't say it's anything *natural*," Crumvell said. "This is only some ugly old woman, not really a nun. She goes to the convent for the summer. Vittoria Colonna, widow of the Marquis of Pescara. She writes poetry. That shows you the sort of person he keeps company with."

Orvieto is not on the road to Rome, but it is not far off. Crumvell and I rode as far as the foot of the rock upon which it stands. We looked up at the walls rising out of the rock, at the gate, at the portcullis over the gate.

"We could hardly get in there without being noticed," I said. "And we certainly could not get out."

"But *he* will come out," Crumvell said. "He'll come down this winding road and, at the turns, whatever guards he has will have to ride before him or behind him. There's no room for two to ride abreast."

I said that a man beginning the two-day journey to Rome (nearly eighty miles away) would start very early in the morning. We did not know which morning the Cardinal meant to travel, and we would arouse suspicion if we inquired. Our best course was to take a room at the nearest wayside inn, and ride towards Orvieto every morning before dawn, on the pretext of taking exercise for our health.

The first day we did this was tedious. I had to listen to Crumvell's talk. "The King *trusts* me," he said "I'll say that for His Grace—he knows a good man when he sees one."

Then he told me, again and again, how quickly he had reached Italy. "Did it inside a fortnight. You don't believe that, do you? Came overland through Germany, you see. The Emperor's a good friend to our King now. I hardly had my passport looked at, all the way."

"What's Germany like?" I asked.

Crumvell screwed his face up. He found such questions hard to answer. At last he said; "The beer's not bad."

That night at the inn he remembered more news from England. "There was a priest called Abel hanged for treason, two days after Cromwell. Now Cromwell's dead, you see, the King means to be fair to all sides. So he hung Abel and two other Papists, and burned three Protestants, all on the same day . . . What are the women like here?"

I said: "The good ones are shut up where you can't get them, and the bad ones have the pox."

"What—nothing in between?" He pinched the rump of a passing servant girl. She turned on him and said something which he asked me to interpret. I did this with some pleasure. "She says an old man like you should know better."

"Old, am I?" shouted Crumvell. "I'll show her!"

I put my hand across his wide mouth, because the girl was now saying something I wanted to hear. She was asking another maid to wake her early, so that she could ask the English Cardinal's blessing as he passed along the road.

When I told Crumvell this he was both joyous and (I thought) frightened that the time had come at last. He perked up when he showed me the pistol that he carried hidden in his doublet. It was a beautiful thing, in delicately chased silver.

"What have *you* got?" Crumvell asked me.

"Only a sword and a dagger," I said.

"That should be enough," said Crumvell. "You can finish him off, if I miss."

The killing should be simple, but to escape afterwards we would need to ride hard until we got into Tuscany. The men of the Papal States could not pursue us there, and the Tuscans were not likely to give us up, since they were at odds with the Pope. We had only to reach Leghorn, where we were sure to find a French or English ship.

"And once we're home . . ." said Crumvell, his red face

gleaming. "Tom, you and I are *made*. You know what? I've been promised a convent. A dear little place, not forty miles from London. Some crippled old women hanging about in almshouses—but I'll soon have *those* out. And you, Tom? I suppose you'll want a letter to an heiress. The right sort of girl, well stuffed and jewelled . . . If only *I* weren't married!"

We rose before dawn. As we neared Orvieto the sun rose, and, with the sun, the portcullis over the gate. And presently out of the gate came the horsemen, the guards, the outriders, making their way slowly down the steep path. As Crumvell had predicted, they rode in single file. At last we saw the Cardinal. Over his red robes flowed a red-gold beard, reaching almost to his waist.

"Is that really Reginald Pole?" I whispered. "When I saw him last, he was clean-shaven."

"He let his beard grow as a sign of mourning," said Crumvell with a laugh, "when his elder brother was beheaded."

If he had not said that . . . If he had not laughed . . .

When the Cardinal's train approached us, we both reined back to the side of the road, as any horseman might when making way for another. We took off our hats and bowed.

I was on Crumvell's right hand. I watched him fumble in his doublet for the pistol. The Cardinal was now so close that I could see his face. His eyes were, as in his youth, fixed on some dream far away. But the old softness had gone; he looked haggard, worn, haunted . . .

This was the time to get my dagger ready. And at that instant I felt myself lean over, grabbing at Crumvell's hand, trying to seize the pistol, trying to fire it harmlessly into the air.

I was clumsy. The pistol went off so close that it deafened me. I lost control of my horse, which bucked and threw me.

As I did a somersault in mid-air, I saw Crumvell's horse bolt, with Crumvell still on its back.

I was in the dust. Instead of pursuing Crumvell, the guards pounced on me, dragged me to my feet, and began to hit me in the mouth.

"Don't hurt that man!" shouted Reginald Pole, in Italian. "He saved my life! The other man was the assassin. I saw this man seize the pistol out of his hand. Look, the powder is black on his face! He nearly blew his own brains out, in saving me." And he began to thank me, in Italian.

I said in English: "I have not deserved your thanks. I came here to murder you." Leaning against the Cardinal's horse, sobbing for want of breath, spitting blood out of my mouth, I cried out: "Where's Michael Throgmorton? He knows me."

The startled English face of Michael, sunburned beneath golden hair, swam into my sight. I kneeled down in the road and said: "Here in the dust I beg your forgiveness that ever I helped Thomas Cromwell against you. I beg your forgiveness that I ever thought I could bribe you or threaten you into killing the Cardinal. And from you, Reginald Pole—" I kissed the hem of his robe, as it hung over the stirrup—"from you I beg forgiveness for my part in all the wrongs done to you and your family. I beg forgiveness for the murder which was in my heart, not a moment ago, until God took my hand into his hand, and made me save your life."

The Cardinal slid from his horse and stood before me. I could not see for weeping, but I felt his hand, moving across my brow to cool and bless.

"God be praised!" he said. "He wishes me to live and suffer still; I must not ask for rest, while I have His work to do."

By this time there was a great noise of people running down the road out of the town. I looked up and saw a lady

of about sixty, dressed all in black, very tall and very thin, who cried out: "Renaldo! Renaldo! Are you hurt?"

"All is well, Signora Marchesa," said the Cardinal. "I have been saved by a miracle—the greatest of all God's miracles, the change in a man's heart."

Michael cried out: "Sir, you may be deceived. This man is a notorious ruffian of Cromwell's. How can he change like this, in a single instant?"

"Why not?" said the Cardinal. "I did. Years ago, I went alone to see King Henry, to tell him of a subtile scheme I had, for accomplishing his divorce. I found myself speechless. And then suddenly the words poured out—the words God gave me, telling the King to take back his wife and child." His hand still on my brow, he said: "God has had mercy on you, as on me."

With her own hands, the Marchesa -Vittoria Colonna, the poetess—dipped her handkerchief in a stream, and washed the powder off my face. Yet Michael Throgmorton still frowned at me.

"Tom Vaughan!" he said "You know, don't you, that these fools have let your companion escape? He'll reach England and make a report on you. Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"None," I said. "And my parents are dead. There is nothing the King can do to me, unless I myself go back."

"You cannot go back," said the Cardinal. "Come, wipe your face, mount your horse, and ride behind me. I will find you a place in my house in Rome."

And so I was received into the Cardinal's household. But before I could be received back into the Church, I had to make a general confession of my life since my country's break with Rome. I wanted to confess to the Cardinal, but he was not a priest. (To the layman, every Cardinal seems a priest, but Reginald Pole was in fact only a canon.)

So I confessed to an Italian priest, Father Beccatelli, who

at this time was secretary to the Cardinal. And now I understood what Katherine had meant, when she said that she could confess only in her mother tongue. For although I had for almost a year been speaking Italian every day, I had to struggle to find the words for what I had done.

"I have sinned . . . I have acted as the tool of a tyrant, not under compulsion but gladly, willingly, with pride . . .I helped the King to spy upon his wife, perhaps I helped to break her heart . . .I tried to tempt the Princess into saying some treason against her father . . . I laid information which afterwards was used against Lady Salisbury . . . I betrayed and denounced Father Abel and Father Barker, and a wood merchant called Arthur Bowers, and two servants whose names I never knew. And because of this a man I had scarcely seen, Sir Nicholas Carew, has been beheaded . . . I helped to destroy the monasteries, reporting the monks' vices, and never once reflecting that I was putting their property into the hands of people far more wicked than they were . . .I tried to root out of my mind the old notions of right and wrong, so that all these things I did would seem right . . . I have committed fornication and adultery, God knows how many times. I have a son growing up in a poor man's house . . . And for none of these things can I make any restitution. I cannot bring Katherine of Aragon back to life. I cannot help Lady Salisbury out of the Tower. I cannot reach my son, to do him any good; I do not know where he is."

"If you truly want to make restitution," Father Beccatelli said, "then, some day, God will give you the means."

# 10

There are heretics who hold that a man once truly repentant never can sin again. How far this is from the truth I can testify, having after my repentance many times told lies, and gone to bed with women. (Sins beneath the Cardinal's notice; he never even saw them.) I had not lost my covetousness, either. When I heard that I had been attainted as a traitor, and that my goods were forfeit to the King, I could not help wondering whether the King knew about my hoard at the goldsmith's.

Yet I held fast to one resolution. I would never again be the willing tool of a tyrant. Many things happened to prevent my forgetting that.

In 1541 there was war again in Italy. Rome was threatened by a mercenary army, and the saddest thing for the Cardinal was that, at the head of this army, rode Ascanio Colonna, the ruffian brother of his saintly friend Vittoria Colonna. She had tried to dissuade her brother from the attack. When she failed, she went to her usual refuge at Orvieto, and wrote to the Cardinal that he too should withdraw from Rome. Not being a soldier, he could do no good there, and her brother would not have spared his life.

As it happened, this attack on Rome was beaten off. But I was glad of the danger, because it meant that we spent the

summer at Capranica, a pleasant little town between the lakes of Braciano and Ronciglione.

Every morning, while it was still cool, the Cardinal called Father Beccatelli and me to deal with his letters. On the morning I remember he greeted us as calmly and pleasantly as ever. Father Beccatelli sorted the letters out, taking as his province those in Latin or Italian, and all which referred to Church business.

"This one I don't understand," he said. "It must be in English. Shall I give it to Signor Vaughan?"

"There is no need," the Cardinal said. "I have read it. I am sorry you cannot understand it; it is good news."

We both congratulated him.

"And so you should," said the Cardinal. "Till now, I thought God had given me a great honour. He made me the son of one of the best ladies in England. But now he has given me a greater honour. I am the son of a martyr."

I snatched the letter off the table. It shook before my eyes, while the Cardinal's voice went on: "Yes, because my mother was constant in the faith, the King has beheaded her -the cousin of his own mother, the lady he once trusted to educate his daughter. We have another blessed soul to intercede for us in Heaven."

But he could not go on so calmly, not with my guilt-stricken face before him. He left us, and went into his private oratory.

The letter was still in my hands. I read it. It was not signed. It said that Lady Salisbury had been beheaded so early in the morning, with so few witnesses, that the fact was at first not believed. Then in the evening "we" as the letter said, were sent for to collect her body. "We" found the Tower women trying to sew on the head, as the custom was before burial. The women could not conceal the terrible gashes, which had mutilated both head and body.

It seemed, the letter went on, that when she was led out to

execution Lady Salisbury had refused to make the usual speech admitting her guilt and praising the King. She said she saw no reason why she should. She would not give the executioner a piece of gold. And she would not lay her head upon the block. The executioner tried to drag her there; she struggled and escaped; and then he caught her by her long grey hair, and hacked as best he could, while she still struggled, still proclaimed her innocence. Here the writer of the letter forget to be anonymous. "And so our mother died speaking the truth, as she taught us to do long ago."

This must come from the Cardinal's sister—Ursula, Lady Stafford.

Father Beccatelli, though he himself was weeping, tried to comfort me.

"You could not have prevented this," he said. "It was not even your old master's doing."

This, when I thought about it, seemed very strange. How could the King dare to do such a thing, when he had no Wolsey, no Cromwell, no "evil counsellors" to take the blame?

Within an hour the Cardinal came back to us, calm as before, and the day's work proceeded. But the next day, when I brought him letters to sign, he said suddenly: "Did Cromwell ever tell you to read Machiavelli?"

"Yes, Monsignore."

"So he did me. When I read that book, I thought it had been written by an enemy of the human race. And yet King Henry could not have murdered my mother, if he had followed Machiavelli's advice—which, is, you remember, that a ruler should *seem* to do good, since the populace are so ignorant as to prefer good to evil. King Henry has done a thing so evidently wicked that the English people cannot any longer be deceived. They *must* understand it now. They *must* revolt."

That expectation, I believe, sustained him through the

years, even when he seemed absorbed in his Italian duties. The Pope made him Governor of the Province of the Patrimony, a rich and beautiful state, though it is hardly fifty miles from end to end. It includes that very Capranica where we had been living, besides Civita Vecchia and Orvieto. The Governor's palace is in Viterbo, a city of great beauty, much adorned with fountains.

Here the Cardinal practised a thing strange to him—the art of government. I did not think a man could have succeeded so well, with such gentleness. He would not even hang a thief, if it seemed that the man had been driven to steal by hunger. On the other hand he would not pardon a nobleman, simply for being a noblemen. When any heresy was reported to him, he himself would reason with the heretic, explaining that what seemed a trifling deviation from the faith might lead into a wilderness of crime. He would describe how he had adored the King of England, how he had at first tried to persuade himself that the King might be in the right against the Pope. It was (he would say) these reasonable-sounding arguments which had led the King into such monstrous cruelty against his wife and daughter, and then against his other kindred. When the Cardinal told the story of his own family, the heretics would nearly always melt. Some stubborn souls might still ask: "Is it part of this faith, for Bishops to live in Rome, away from their sees, and openly flaunt their mistresses in the streets?" Then the Cardinal would agree that the state of Rome was a scandal to Christendom. He would urge them to stay in the Church, and like himself work to reform it from within.

What convinced them was to see him already practising this reform. When he received petitioners, once a week, in the great hall of his palace, he would not accept even the most trifling presents. He let it be known that any servant who took such presents would be instantly turned out of doors.

Since he had to live in a palace, he kept up a stately hospitality. But there was never any gluttony or drunkenness. The Cardinal himself supervised the accounts. He would not keep any servant who had no real work to do; he did not think his dignity required an idle crowd of retainers.

Here I was useful to him; I had experience both of Cromwell's lavish household and Katherine's straitened one. I knew where economies could be made, and where they would prove more trouble than they were worth.

The Cardinal felt it as a burden that he had to make a splendid appearance whenever he went to Rome. For all his reforming zeal, Pope Paul III could not endure to see his Cardinals "dressed like Lutherans." They must carry handkerchiefs edged with fine lace, and wear lace ruffles at their wrists.

This lace was very dear in Rome. As always, when he hoped for an economy, the Cardinal turned to me. I said I would look for lace in Viterbo, in the alley ways where the craftsmen sit outside the doors of their shops. And in fact, among the cobblers and the harness makers, I found a woman making lace so beautiful that it was like a poem. Inside her shop she had work not quite so fine, made at her direction by the peasant women round about.

As I talked to this woman I thought her face battle-scarred, like the face of Italy. The wrinkles round her eyes were white against her sunburn. And (like the face of Italy) this face was full of a great eagerness to live. The woman smiled at last, and I could see she was not much past thirty. Soon she was telling me that she was a widow, and without a child, and lonely. When we had agreed upon a price for the lace, it did not take us long to agree on other matters.

This was convenient. I could visit the shop when I liked, without giving scandal. Not all my visits were pleasant. Sometimes, as I lay upstairs waiting for her, I heard her bullying the outworkers who brought her lace. If they

brought it after sundown she made them take it away again. They were trying to cheat her, she shouted; trying to pass off bad work by candlelight. If they brought it by sunlight, and there was one flaw to be seen, she would not pay. She would not advance money on work not yet done; the most heartrending tale of a sick husband or starving child would leave her unmoved.

When I was angry with her, for being so hard, she would answer: "If you'd known what it was to lose everything, you'd understand why I take good care of my money."

Once I told her: "But I *have* lost everything. In my own country I'm proclaimed an outlaw, and all my goods are forfeit to the King."

She was sorry for me then, to be so punished for following the Cardinal, who was a saint.

"But still," she said, "you can live well enough, so long as you live here. It's not the same. It's not like what happened to me in the sack of Rome."

I said that in those days she must have been still a child.

"Not much more," she said, "but married. My husband was a gunner on the ramparts of the Castle of St. Angelo. He looked down and saw the Spaniards burst into the city, and saw me running towards the castle for shelter, and saw the Spaniards catch me and rape me there, in the streets. He could not fire on them, for fear of killing me. Afterwards he cursed himself for not firing, because he saw me lying on a heap of corpses, and he thought I was dead. The Spaniards, you see, had been pulling at a gold chain I wore around my neck. They could not trouble themselves to undo the clasp. They came so near to strangling me, I was in a deep swoon; I never knew what more they had done to me, till I woke on this heap of corpses, my necklace gone, my rings gone, my dress ripped all to pieces. When my poor husband crept out by night and found me, he didn't know whether to be glad I was alive. Because it was not much of a

life; we could not go on living where people knew that other men had possessed me."

"But against your will! When you were not even conscious!"

"My husband always felt it as his disgrace, that he had not been able to protect me. It preyed on his mind for years after; I reckon that was what killed him."

"But surely every woman in Rome was raped?"

"You might as well say—half the men in Rome were killed, and so it was no trouble to be dead. Murder is murder, shame is shame; they may tell you it's done for great reasons of church and state, but what's the difference? Oh, I know I was luckier than some. I didn't give birth to a child with a Spanish face. But we lost everything. Our house was burned down. We came here on foot, penniless. My husband's cousin lent us the money to open this shop, but he made us pay it back. With interest. I'm paying still. Don't you call me hard! I couldn't live in this world if I weren't as hard as a rock."

When I made my Easter confession to Father Beccatelli, he shook his head sadly over this woman of mine. If I would let him arrange the matter, he said, he could marry me to a girl of good family, a girl brought up in the proper Italian style, behind bars. I refused. It was not that I so passionately loved my lace-maker. But I could talk to her. I did not see how I could talk to a girl brought up "in the proper Italian style", knowing nothing outside her father's courtyard. It was a marvel to me that these timid brides, whom I had seen without envy bestowed on other men, could ever turn into such vigorous, talented old women as Vittoria Colonna and her friends.

Even Vittoria Colonna, who had been some years a widow, and sole ruler of a great estate, did not live on her estate as an English dowager would, but moved between various nunneries. When she stayed in Viterbo she came

every day to the Governor's palace, but always with some sullen, stupid nuns in attendance. Whether she was reading her own poetry aloud, or reasoning with the Cardinal about theology, she must always have these uncomprehending faces near her. Otherwise, old as she was, she would have lost her good name.

I longed for the bold, free women of my own country. And that was not the only kind of homesickness I felt. In winter, when the wind howled through the great marble palace, and we huddled near the charcoal braziers, I thought of roaring English fires in panelled rooms. One winter I was so cold that I grew a beard. It did not make my chin a great deal warmer, but it looked splendid—coal black, and as long as the Cardinal's red-gold beard. So I went on wearing it, even through the cruel heat of the Sirocco.

Hot or cold, I was never so homesick as Michael Throgmorton. Though he was steward of the Cardinal's household and gave the Italian servants their orders, he could not follow the language when it was rapidly spoken. So the talk of the Cardinal with his friends, which made me forget my homesickness, was lost on Michael. He would ask me to explain.

"What was all that about faith and works?"

"The Cardinal told Vittoria Colonna not to perplex herself with questions too difficult for the angels. He said she should do good works as if works alone could save her, and believe as if she could be saved only by faith."

"And what was that long dispute with that scowling fellow—the artist?"

"Vittoria told Signor Buonarroti that some of his works looked pagan. He said he did not know how he could glorify God better than by displaying the works of God, and of these the most noble and beautiful was the human body."

"I don't like that Buonarroti. They say he's a lover of boys."

"I've never seen any sign of it."

"Oh, not when he stays with the Cardinal. But in Rome. You can do *anything* in Rome."

This was true. Every visit we made to Rome was to the Cardinal a source of anguish; to me, I confess, a pleasure. The pomp and luxury of more than a hundred bishops, who should have been living in their dioceses, was a scandal, but it made the streets very splendid. It was in Rome that I first saw a play. In the courtyard of a palace belonging to the Pope's grandson (who had been made a Cardinal at sixteen) a boy dressed as a woman simpered modestly, while the other actors expounded fantastic schemes to seduce him-her. Churchmen and their jewelled mistresses applauded as the play ended with a paean of praise to successful adultery. This was "Mandragola." The author's name I knew—Machiavelli. It was not the play I had imagined, but it enchanted me, and I was forever slipping away to such entertainments.

The Pope, urged on by our Cardinal, set a time-limit, by which all bishops who had no business in Rome should leave. They stayed. He set another time-limit. And another . . . It was our Cardinal who left Rome, whenever he could, for his own world of peace and order at Viterbo.

We were in Viterbo at the end of July, 1543, when we heard that King Henry had married a sixth wife, the widow of old Lord Latimer—Katherine Parr. Soon we had an even stranger message. A man from England had come to the gate of the town. He would not say who he was, and he would not get up off his knees.

The Cardinal sent Michael Throgmorton and me to see him. Wide eyes, as blue as the Cardinal's own, looked at us out of a poor lost face. It was not an old face, but the hair and brows were white. "Don't you know me?" said the stranger. "You've seen me at court."

So I had, but in those days the weak and wandering face

had been hardened with a certain pride of birth. Now it had no pride left. "I am not worthy to be the Cardinal's brother," whispered Sir Geoffrey Pole. "But, such as I am, I have come to beg his forgiveness."

I went in to prepare the Cardinal. "Monsignore!" I said. "I once heard Queen Katherine say: 'Even those who have not the strength of the martyrs, even those who betray both God and their kinsfolk–still, if they repent, they will find forgiveness.' "

The Cardinal instantly came out to see his brother.

"I tried to kill myself!" Sir Geoffrey cried out. "Give me that credit, that I tried to kill myself. I knew I should never be able to stand the torture. I knew that when they put me on the rack I should denounce my mother and my brother. I knew all my family would come to the block through me."

The Cardinal's hand moved across his brother's brow, as once it had moved across mine. "There is more joy in Heaven . . ." he murmured. But suddenly he thought of asking: "Where is you wife? Where are your two sons?"

"I had to leave them behind," said Sir Geoffrey.

"But what will the King do to them?" asked the Cardinal.

"Nothing. The new Queen is good and kind; she will protect them. She's the lady who brought Michael's brother out of the Tower."

"And our sister Ursula?" pursued the Cardinal. "And her son?"

"Her son? Young Tom Stafford? If he's in any danger, it won't be because of loyalty to the Church. The King isn't persecuting our sort now. He reckons he has more to fear from the extreme Protestants. They're everywhere. You engage an honest young priest–what looks like an honest young priest–to tutor your sons, and, before you know where you are, he's teaching them heresy. That's what happened to Ursula's boy. Fifteen– and as fierce a Protestant as you could meet."

The Cardinal turned pale, and said: "This is the worst news I've had yet."

Nothing could be more gentle, nothing more thoughtful, than the Cardinal's care of his brother. He lodged him in the best part of the palace, let him have servants and money, and arranged his formal absolution and readmission to the Church. Only he could not bear to have him in the same room. The Cardinal himself, I believe, was not aware of his own feelings. He said (and meant) that it was for Sir Geoffrey's own safety that he sent him to live under the protection of the Bishop of Liège.

It was the safety of the Cardinal which really concerned us all. At the beginning of 1545, Vittoria Colonna came to Viterbo with the news that King Henry had hired a notorious condottiere, Ludovico d'Armi, to lead some twenty horsemen in an ambush on the Cardinal. The matter was known all over Italy.

"But they cannot reach you here," she said. "You will be safe, if only you give up your plan of going to Trent."

"I must go to Trent," said the Cardinal. "Everything I have worked for, all this time—the reform of the Church, the purifying of doctrine, the proper training of priests—all this will be settled at the Council of Trent, or not at all."

"They should have held it at Rome."

"No; it must be on the Emperor's territory. We can do nothing without the Emperor's good will."

"Then the Emperor must give you a bodyguard."

"I am sure he will, when I reach his frontier. Till then I shall trust to a Venetian bodyguard."

"That's just what you can't do! Some of the Venetian senators are in league with Ludovico d'Armi; otherwise he would have been arrested long ago. And even if they wanted to protect you . . . Venice is so weak now, from fighting the Turk, that she can't spare good men to patrol her own land

frontiers. Those mountains between Venice and Trent are a death-trap. Even ordinary travellers are murdered every day. What hope is there for you? Consider, my dear, dear Renaldo, my own adopted son—you cannot help the Council if you are murdered on the way."

"I can hardly help it much if I'm too cowardly to go."

All this time the scowling Signor Buonarroti, the artist, had been listening in silence. Now he asked the Cardinal: "Have you ever seen this Ludovico d'Armi?"

"No."

"And so far as you know he has never seen you?"

"No."

"Then all he will be looking for is a man in a cardinal's robes, with a long fair beard?"

Vittoria knew at once what was in his mind. "But it is impossible!" she cried out. "To dress up a man in the same robes is easy enough, but to find one who will expose himself to the same danger—"

"That is not impossible," said Signor Buonarroti. "It's not a rare thing in this house to hear somebody say: 'I'd give my life for the Cardinal.' You see, Monsignore, you are not like other churchmen. You never strike your servants, nor let your steward strike them. You never keep them waiting for their wages. When they are old you pension them generously; when they are sick you send your doctor to them, and visit them yourself to make sure they are well tended. You have restored their faith in mankind, no less than you have restored my faith in the Church."

"As in your paintings," said the Cardinal with a smile, "you are looking at some ideal figure, rather than at the model before you."

"No, it is all true," said Vittoria. "But the man who takes the Cardinal's place must not be an ordinary servant. He has to deceive not only the condottieri, but everyone who might be their accomplice—every innkeeper, every peasant along

the way. I am afraid I must add—every priest. He must have the speech and manners of a gentleman."

"One thing at a time!" Signor Buonarroti said. "First, he must be as tall as the Cardinal."

"He must speak Italian well," said Vittoria, "but with an English accent."

Throughout this conversation Michael and I were standing behind the Cardinal's chair. I could see Michael frowning, feeling that this was important, trying to pick up a word that would tell him why. I understood the words, but what I heard loudest was a beating behind my own brow.

Vittoria said: "But where shall we find a man with hair and beard of the right colour?"

I came forward, bowed, and said: "Signora Marchesa, there is no need. My hair and beard can be dyed."

The Cardinal cried out: "Stop! This is all a fantasy. You are asking me to degrade my robe, which is red for one reason—to remind me that every cardinal must be ready to give his blood for the church! I will not let anyone borrow my robe, or my danger."

I knelt before him, and as I did so I thought that, although he scarcely moved, his flesh shrank from me, as from his brother. That made me desperate. I cried out: "Monsignore! When I confessed—beside many other crimes—my share in your mother's martyrdom, Father Beccatelli said that God would give me the means to make restitution. Now the means are in my hands. I am just your height. My beard is the same length as yours. I speak Italian well, but with an English accent. It is as if God had put me on the earth for nothing else. Monsignore, do not rob me of the means to ease my conscience."

This petition he could not, in the end, refuse. The matter was kept secret, or as secret as it could be, for Vittoria's nuns, as usual, had been listening. When I said farewell to my lace-maker, I found that she knew all about it, and was in

agonies of terror for me. "Of course everybody knows!" she said. "But only inside Viterbo. We won't tell anyone outside. We're the Cardinal's bodyguard, all of us, in this [illegible]."

Still, it went outside the town. The Pope had to be told, so that he could give the Cardinal a dispensation for wearing disguise. I had a dispensation for wearing his robe, and for blessing the people along the way. (Which would otherwise have been a blasphemy.)

Then Cardinal del Monte, and Cardinal St. Croce, with whom we were travelling, had to know that I would take the Cardinal's place at Bassano, a day's journey north of Venice.

When we stayed in Venice itself, I walked about the Piazza until I found a harlot whose hair was dyed just the colour of the Cardinal's beard. Then I followed her and paid her, to her surprise, for no service but to show me where her barber could be found. I promised the barber a good wage to come with us as far as Bassano, but I did not tell him why.

We were three days in Venice. Now I could see the place. Now it was not suffused in bloody colours, but in the soft warm light of early May.

And I could visit Marco Rafael. I found him standing in his kitchen, talking to his mother. She stared suspiciously at me. But I greeted her in Spanish, and she instantly softened.

"Have you come to consult my son?" she asked. "You couldn't do better! You see those books in there? He's read them all. Every one! It's no wonder all the great men come to ask his advice. He goes to the Doge's palace every day."

"Not *every* day, mother!" Marco protested.

She went on: "So you've come to see him all the way from Spain!"

I explained that I was from England.

"England!" Her face went hard again. "That's where they massacre Jews."

"Not that I know of, Señora."

"Yes! They were massacred in a place called York."

"Oh, mother, mother!" Marco broke in. "That was more than three hundred years ago. There are no Jews in England now."

"What can that be like—a country with no Jews?"

"Very dull," I said. "Very short of beautiful women."

This made the old lady laugh so much that we parted good friends. When she had gone Marco said: "I hope you understand. My mother thinks of nothing but massacres. Her own experience..."

"Now that I think of it," I said, "although we have no Jews in England, they are always coming into our speech. When anyone complains of being roughly handled, in some barbarous village, he says: 'They pelted me with mud, as if I were a Jew.' Isn't that strange?"

"To me," said Marco, "it is not so very strange."

Like everyone else in Venice, Marco knew of the Cardinal's danger. Though a warrant was out for Ludovico d'Armi, and he dared not show his face in the city itself, he had been swaggering round the villages to the north. With twenty armed horsemen round him, and some powerful friends in the Senate, he seemed invulnerable.

"Nowadays we can no longer keep order along our own boundaries," Marco said sadly. "But at least we are giving the Cardinal a bodyguard."

To my great relief, Marco said nothing about my own danger. Since, in the course of his interpreting, he heard every rumour in Venice, I took this as a sure sign that our secret had not travelled so far north.

"The King of England knows what he is doing," said Marco. "He could not inflict a greater wound on the Church!

If Cardinal Pole is killed before he reaches Trent, the Council will achieve nothing."

I said what I could say to no one else. "Perhaps in any case nothing will be achieved. What hope is there for a Church where this one man is reckoned a marvel, because he keeps his vows, and does his plain duty to the people? What hope is there when so many pious men—men I have seen at the Cardinal's very table, talking no more heresy than he talks—are driven by fear of the Roman Inquisition to take refuge in Geneva? Whenever one of his friends deserts him like this, the Cardinal shakes his head and says the man has forgotten that there is no salvation outside the Church. But is there any salvation within the Church?"

"More, I think, than in Geneva," said Marco. "They put people to death for adultery there, which would not suit some of our Venetian Protestants. And surely it is contrary to the words of Christ? As for England—do you want to go back to England?"

I explained why this was impossible. I told Marco all my past life, and he did not once turn away from me. At my basest actions he nodded, as if recognising some old acquaintance.

"I have done so much evil," I said, "and felt so sure of myself while I was doing it, that now I cannot be sure—am I still in the wrong? You, Marco—you've cut yourself off from your own people. You must have longed for them as I long sometimes for England. Tell me—am I doing right?"

Marco said: "Suppose you did the opposite? If you went back and made peace with old King Harry . . ."

"That would be the worst of all my crimes."

"Then what you are doing is, at least, less wrong."

I told him Queen Katherine's words. "God never lets us, poor sinful creatures, be quite right."

"Then that's your answer!" said Marco. "What more can anyone say? Except that it's a hard fate, as things are, to be

born an Englishman. Perhaps even harder than to be born a Jew. But, my dear Signor Vaughan, if ever you find it too hard, if ever you feel that your choice is between two impossible evils, then come and live here, in my son's room. He has no need of it now; he is Professor of Greek at Bologna. I can find you plenty of work at my own trade—interpreting."

His gentle Giulietta seconded the invitation. This was kind, but it was not what I had wanted to hear. If you are going to risk your life in a cause, then you want to be told that it is a good cause, not that it is a hair's breadth better than a bad one.

At Bassano the Castello degli Ezzeloni had been prepared for us to spend the night. Nobody slept. The barber spent many hours on dyeing my hair, beard and eyebrows. When I objected to the stench of his concoctions, he said: "But it's pure virgin's urine!" Then he painted, enamelled and powdered my face to a suitable pallor.

I felt pale enough as I stuck my beard out of a window, trying to disperse the stench in the sweet wind from the mountains. I dozed off there, on my feet. But at three in the morning the Cardinal sent for me, to give me his robe and his blessing. He looked very haggard in the candlelight. Seeing him in plain doublet and hose, I knew for the first time how thin he was. He might have been wasted by disease, or passion.

Beside him stood an even stranger figure—Michael, in a rough jerkin of wolfskin, covered with a breastplate. He was buckled round with weapons—two pistols, a sword and a dagger.

"A peasant is leading the Cardinal by a footpath," he said. "I go too, in case there's treachery." Then he laughed. "You old sly-boots—because you understand Italian, you were the first to come forward. But I'll show you! I'll be the first into Trent."

We embraced. It should have been a solemn moment, but

each of us thought the other's costume so ludicrous that we were giggling like schoolboys. Even the Cardinal smiled as he gave me a loaded pistol.

"This is the one you seized from the assassin's hand," he said. "My men found it afterwards, in the road. It may be of some help."

As I kissed his cold hand I knew my reason for risking my life. It was not that the cause was good, but that the man was, and that I could not bear my life unless he were friends with me.

He set out in the dawn, with no company but Michael and the peasant guide. I set out not long after, in pomp and splendour. The two other Cardinals, and their attendants, rode ahead. I had Father Beccatelli riding with me, and thirty servants, all armed, directly in front of us.

The bodyguard from Venice—another thirty men—rode behind us, because it was Ludovico d'Armi's custom to attack from the rear.

I thought I made a splendid figure on my white horse, with my red robe streaming over its flanks. The peasants on their way to work kneeled to me, and I duly blessed them. So strongly did the robe work on my inmost feelings, that I looked with pure fatherly kindness on the young peasant girls.

As soon as we left Bassano we began to climb, along the path which clings to the side of Monte Grappa. For some hours we rode in cool and pleasant shadow. Across the River Brenta, in the early sunshine, men worked far up the mountainside, in the fields and vineyards that Italians make wherever any little flatness can be made. But even an Italian could make no flatness from the Grappa. It rose above us, sometimes in sheer cliffs, and sometimes in a wooded steepness which I thought more terrible. On the naked cliff there could not be an ambush, but any slope which can hold a tree can hide a man. As I rode I never ceased to look up to my right for signs of movement.

While I feared an attack, I feared still more that there would not be one. This would mean that our secret was out, and perhaps that the peasant now guiding the Cardinal was guiding him into the arms of the condottieri. And in that case who would ever believe that I was not to blame?

The first place where we rested, Valstagna, had over its gate a stone lion of St. Mark. But it was a very old lion, its tail half crumbled away, as the power of Venice was crumbling along these edges of its empire. The sight gave me no comfort.

Yet Valstagna had walls and turrets enough. The people of those parts take their danger as much for granted as we English take our safety. However far the peasants may scatter by day to their fields on the mountainside, they come together at night in a huddle of stone.

And amid the stone, in the courtyard of the poor tavern there, my Venetian bodyguard seemed to feel safe. Drinking endless wine (at the Cardinal's expense) and eating great slabs of coarse country bread, they looked as comfortably settled as if they had grown roots. It was almost a day's work to make them move on.

When we did move, the sun was already high. It struck at us down the clefts of the wooded slopes. Now I could not look up for signs of ambush, because that meant looking directly into the sun. For all my urging, the horses were flagging in the heat. We moved slowly, and yet fast enough to get ourselves out of sight of Valstagna. We were not yet in sight of the next place, Cismon. It seemed to me that this must be the dangerous part of the road.

I looked round for the Venetians. They had vanished. "Where are you, drunkards?" I shouted. "Come on, lazybones!" And then as I found I was getting no answer: "Traitors! Traitors, where are you?"

While I was standing up in the stirrups to shout, the first shot out of the woods killed my horse. As the poor creature

staggered I slid from it, and so avoided the second shot, which knocked off my red hat.

What happened next is out of my memory now, as it was out of my reasoning then. It was my legs and not my mind that carried me full tilt along the road, and downwards, downwards, back towards Valstagna. And still the shots came whistling and echoing after me. I had gone more than a quarter of a mile before I thought of hiding myself. Then I did what I could have done at first; I left the road and went crashing down through the bushes, towards the river. The Cardinal's robe was a hindrance; I tore it off, and left it to flutter on a bush. In my plain common clothes I slid through the undergrowth, panting and sobbing with fear. Once I almost lost my footing and fell into the river. It came to me then that something I did not commonly wear was weighing me down. I stopped and felt about my waist. The great carved pistol struck against my hand.

Yes, and against my heart. I turned sick and cold to think that I had run away, when I had at hand a weapon for my defence. It had been my duty to stand against the attackers, and answer fire with fire. For what else had I drilled, every Sunday afternoon, in England? I had learned it all. I should have made a rampart of my horse's body, and fired from behind it, meanwhile rallying my servants to fire from behind their horses.

*I had run away.* What would the Italians think of me? How could I ever again hold up my head, calling myself English, and a gentleman?

At least they should not see me with tears on my face. I crawled down to the river and washed myself. The remains of my whore's complexion floated away on the stream. But my beard seemed to be keeping its colour.

Perhaps it was not too late to redeem my honour, by going back to the road, and facing my enemies with a pistol

in my hand. I began to climb back. Then I heard the voice of Father Beccatelli.

"Signor Vaughan! Signor Vaughan! Are you hurt?"

I called back, and went on climbing through the bushes. Soon Father Beccatelli's hand pulled me up to the road. Then the other servants came running. I stood holding my pistol, scowling up at the mountain, looking for the attackers—looking, indeed, at anything, rather than into the servants' eyes.

They kneeled down in the dusty road and kissed my hands. They embraced my knees. One man even kissed my dusty boots.

I asked them how they dared make game of me. But my voice was drowned in many voices. My laggard bodyguard had come up at last.

Besides reproaching these Venetians, the servants told them, over and over again, what a brave thing I had done. I had saved all their lives; I had drawn the enemy's fire by running along the road in a crimson robe which could be seen for miles. "And as cunning as he was brave! When at last he hid, he left his red robe on a bush to be shot at, so that they would use up all their powder!"

The Venetians agreed that the condottieri must indeed have used up all their powder, and would be some time reloading. They made a pretence of hunting for them amid the trees.

Meanwhile the red robe was retrieved from the bush, and reverently placed on my shoulders. The hat, with its bullet hole, was placed on my head. I would rather have done anything on earth than wear these clothes again. Anything—except admitting to these Italians that I was afraid.

I took what comfort I could in remembering that, as the beggar-soldier told me long ago, an arquebus is not much use against a moving target. But we were scarcely moving. I was riding a horse which one of the servants gave up to

me; he was walking; and it was a question whether he or the horse panted more slowly uphill.

I never felt more surprise than on seeing Cismon, and finding myself still alive. Dinner was ready for us there, and a place to rest through the heat of the day.

While I lay in a wretched room—the best room the place had—and tried to sleep, my siesta was broken by voices from the courtyard, still recounting how very brave I had been. To complete the story, the servants added that I was not the real Cardinal Pole. I had taken my countryman's fate on my shoulders, as Christ took the sins of the world. I ought to have got up and shouted to them to stop talking. But it was too late; the secret was already out. And surely the condottieri must have seen that I was not the Cardinal; else why had they not attacked again? Probably the real Cardinal, on his mountain footpath, was already in danger from these men. I ought to get up and do something . . . I slept.

As we set out again, in the cool of the evening, I called the captain of the faithless bodyguard. "If you fall behind me again," I said, "I shall report you to the Senate, and gladly see every one of you hung head down between the pillars of the Piazzetta. And if these assassins attack us a second time, remember—we all stand our ground! We still have our powder and shot. We can fire from behind the horses."

"Monsignore!" protested the captain. "Have you thought of the poor horses?"

With such companions, I was glad that I had only a little way to go before the frontier.

Soon, as the light grew golden, there opened before us a plain flat as Lincolnshire, but still between high mountains. The plain was white with tents, and from each tent came soldiers to greet us and guard us, and welcome us in to the Emperor's territory. The Tyrolean guards, broad men with muscle-swollen calves, cried out to us in their own barbarous tongue. The two cardinals who had gone before embraced

us. It was no use for me to tell them I was not a hero; they looked only at the bullet hole in my hat.

We heard a halloo from somewhere far up the Monte Fior. The Tyroleans answered, and went bounding up a slope that looked fit only for goats. Presently they returned, leading down the real Cardinal Pole. We kneeled down, every one of us kneeled down, amid the flowers of that mountain meadow, and gave thanks.

When the Cardinal had been conducted to a tent of silk, I gave him back his robe and hat. He was almost too weary to speak, but he gave me his blessing. This time, I thought he did not shrink from me.

Michael and I shared a tent among the Tyroleans. As they kept watch, their songs made me feel how far I was from home. These were not the soft songs of Italy, nor the tunes which we in England lead through a maze of harmonies. They were simple, pounding, harsh, like the tread of marching feet.

Michael said: "What's this all the Italians have been trying to tell me about you? You did something very brave."

I had to tell the truth to someone. I told him.

Michael rolled on his pallet, hardly able to speak for laughing. I said: "Who knows—you might have done the same."

"I'm not laughing at you," Michael spluttered. "It's only that I'm so happy! To think you were afraid, like any honest man!"

"Why shouldn't I be afraid?"

Michael said: "We heard the shots where we were, high up on the opposite mountain. The Cardinal said: 'God forgive me, for letting Tom Vaughan take my place! They're firing on him.' And I said—forgive me, Tom!—I said: 'If they really are.' "

"Michael! Did you think I was in league with the condottieri?"

"Not really. Not quite. And yet . . . I did have a doubt in my mind. The Cardinal was angry with me for saying so. He said I should be charitable; I should remember that, when Cromwell taught you to lie and deceive, you were very young. He said that in these past five years you'd shown you could be honest. But I—forgive me!—I still wasn't sure."

"But Michael, if I've had some practice in deceit, so have you. You deceived Cromwell into thinking you a simpleton."

"That wasn't hard; I *am* a bit of a simpleton. I suppose I'm jealous of you, Tom, for being clever. You speak so many languages—it makes you seem not quite an Englishman."

"Nor I am. I'm half Spanish."

"Yes, but when I say English, I mean honest. Thank God, now I know you're honest. Forgive me, Tom!"

From straw pallet to straw pallet, across the sweet-smelling grass, we shook hands.

"This," Michael said, "is the best hour that ever I spent out of England."

# 11

After the failure of the Council of Trent—"its failure *for the time being*," the Cardinal carefully said—we returned safely, for Ludovico d'Armi was at last in a Venetian prison.

At Viterbo, I found my lace-maker married. "You've been eighteen months away," she whispered. "And you never said you would be faithful."

I smiled, thinking of Trent, where I'd been reckoned a hero. The beautiful women who followed the bishops there had competed for my attention.

"And I knew you'd never marry me," the lace-maker went on. "You being a gentleman. So when this widower made me such a good offer . . ."

There was nothing unreasonable in her words. What I could not understand was why she trembled while she said them. She would not meet my eyes, but stared down at the counter and clung to it as if needing that support. Could she be—what I had never thought her—distracted with love for me?

"He's a good man," she said. "Very peaceable. He won't do you any harm. I mean—he won't be the first to quarrel."

Now I understood. It was not love that made her tremble, but fear. I laughed aloud at the thought of killing a man for the sake of this woman.

"Cheer up!" I said. "God send you a good marriage! I promise I shall do nothing to disturb it."

We parted smiling, and it was only later that I felt how much I was alone, how much an exile.

The woman's fears had, for Italy, been reasonable. The Cardinal spent the first days of his return in examining the petitions of people imprisoned by his deputy. Many of these were men who had knifed other men, and thought imprisonment too harsh for such a trifling offence. One, who had killed his best friend, pleaded: "Monsignore, misfortune can happen to anybody!"

"There you are!" whispered Michael, who understood this phrase, having heard it so often from the servants. "That's Italy!"

I said that, although one grown man might be fiercer to another than in England, they were more gentle to their children. I never saw one beaten. Nor did the husbands often beat their wives.

"They kill them, though," said Michael. "A moment of jealousy, and there goes another 'misfortune'. There's always that fear—"

He broke off, staring out of the window. In the streets below a cobbler, working in the open air, looked up at us. It was a long look, and intent, but I could not fathom the expression.

From arguing against Michael, I began to take his side. What I could not endure was to see a country which ought to have been more secure than England (since it was defended on three sides by sea, and on one by impregnable mountains) constantly destroying itself. Whenever one city-state felt aggrieved by another, it would call in a French or Spanish or German army. And within each city there was always a faction in prison or in exile, conspiring to seize power by means of yet another mercenary army. Because of these constant wars the Italians, who locked up their

women to protect them from love, could not always protect them from rape.

I began to look with Michael's eyes at the palaces, at the fountains, at the new statues arising every day before us. If the Italians were more civilised than ourselves, then surely they were also more perverse in scheming to destroy what they had built.

In the Cardinal's province there was peace. A college was founded at Viterbo; the Cardinal inaugurated a lectureship of philosophy there. In the country round about, people began to plant orchards, as if they believed they would be there to pick the fruit. One landowner proudly showed the Cardinal his young apple trees and said: "I hope you will come back to see them in thirty years' time."

"Don't say that!" the Cardinal cried out. "Don't wish me so long away from my own country!"

This was the first time that Michael and I understood that he, like ourselves, was tormented by homesickness.

Michael was the first of us to see England again. The opportunity came in 1547, when old King Henry died. That was a day of rejoicing in Rome, for everyone but the Cardinal. Walking up and down, his eyes bent on the gound, he cried out to me: "I loved the man! You saw him, Tom, but only in his grossness, only after God had given him over. If you had seen him as I saw him, twentyeight years ago, when he sent me abroad to study and gave me a purse full of gold and told me, as if he believed it with all his heart, that learning was better than gold, and the love of God better still . . . Now they say he died unrepentant, making no confession—not even to one of his own heretic preachers. If he had given one sign of penitence . . ."

I told him of the King's tears, on reading Queen Katherine's last letter, but added that I thought the tears were quickly dried.

"We must trust to the mercy of God," the Cardinal said.

"One tear of honest penitence might be enough to put out the flames of Hell."

The Pope was surprised that the Cardinal did not think this a likely time to bring England back to the faith. "This young King Edward is only nine years old," the Cardinal explained. "And all his tutors are heretics. I believe Cranmer and his kind will seize this opportunity to bring in even stranger innovations. However, I will see what can be done." And he set about obtaining a safe-conduct for Michael. Although I longed to go instead of Michael, I did not say so, because I knew that Michael's homesickness was worse than mine. Living with the Cardinal had, perhaps, made me a better man.

This journey, which Michael had longed for as for a sight of Paradise, made him almost glad to come back to Italy.

"It's just as you said," he told the Cardinal. "The Protestants have come right into the open. While the old King was alive, the priests went on saying Mass just as they do here, and the ignorant sort never noticed much difference, except that some of the images were pulled down, and once a year there was a sermon preached against the Pope. Now there's to be no more Mass, and Cranmer has put out a new prayer-book in English. The young King's all for it; who's to tell him otherwise? His uncles (Jane Seymour's brothers) are outright heretics, and they're all-powerful now. One of them, Sir Thomas Seymour, has married the old King's last wife, Katherine Parr."

"So soon?" asked the Cardinal. "How long did the woman mourn?"

"Not six weeks, I believe. But, Monsignore, don't be hard on Katherine Parr. I went to see her, to thank her for bringing my brother safe out of the Tower. It seems he wasn't the only one she saved. The night the old King died, the Duke of Norfolk was in the Tower. The usual thing—found guilty of high treason, with not so much evidence as

would hang a puppy. The Seymours and their gang never gave him a thought; they were all too busy plotting among themselves who should have control of the young King. It was Katherine Parr who remembered. She went from one to another, reminding them that the death warrant was out already. The Duke was to be executed at daybreak. Some of them said: 'What of it?' Because he'd spat in the faces of so many victims, even his niece Anne Boleyn, and his other niece, Katherine Howard. There wasn't one person alive who had any reason to love the old Duke. He'd certainly never shown any kindness to Katherine Parr. For all that, she kept on at the Seymours. She said they all—herself included—had blood enough on their souls. They'd stood by without a word when the old King signed the death warrants of innocent people. At least, now that he was dead, they could save this one life. She got her way. They woke some clerk and fetched out the Great Seal and made out a reprieve for the Duke. It reached him when he thought he had an hour to live."

"So even in King Henry's court, there was one person with a conscience."

"Yes, Monsignore, I believe Katherine Parr has a conscience. And as for marrying again so soon—well! By all accounts she was more old Harry's slave than his wife. And always in terror! Once he nearly sent her to the Tower. Yet she still speaks of him like a Christian. I'll tell you straight, Monsignore—I couldn't help liking her."

"Why should you help it?"

"She's an out-and-out heretic. And she's persuaded my poor brother's boys to be the same. They're set on bad ways; you try reasoning with them! It's enough to break your heart."

The Cardinal eagerly began: "Did you see . . ." Then he hesitated, and went on: " . . . the Princess Mary?"

"No; for her sake I kept away. But I know she's told

the Seymour gang outright—she'll die before she changes her religion."

"Thank God!" said the Cardinal. "There is one faithful soul in England."

"More than one, Monsignore. There's the two bishops in the Tower—Gardiner and Bonner."

"Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester? But he was one of the worst . . . Why, Michael, you must be mistaken. Did you never see Gardiner's book? It's one long attack on the Pope, except where it's an abject defence of the King's right to execute Fisher and More."

"And yet he's in the Tower now. And he says he'll be martyred gladly, rather than give up the Mass. And Bonner, Bishop of London, says the same. Although he was another of King Harry's brisk boys."

The Cardinal said: "Yes, Bonner wrote the preface to Gardiner's book. Praise be to God who can change the hardest heart!" Not until then did he ask: "And my sister? Did you see my sister?"

"Oh yes! Lady Stafford was very kind to me. Monsignore, I should have told you this first! She's as good a Catholic as you are. When she engaged this tutor to teach her boy, she had no notion he was a heretic. And the boy, Tom Stafford, is not such a heretic neither—that is, not a *desperate* heretic. He said—" Michael wrinkled his brow, trying to remember the unfamiliar phrase "— he said he was trying to keep an open mind. He's learning Italian, so he can come and see Rome for himself."

"An open mind!" repeated the Cardinal. "Between truth and error? Is that the state of the young men today?"

"Oh, your nephew is much better than most," Michael said. "At least he takes it all seriously. A lot of the young people say they belong to 'the third religion.'"

"What's that?"

"Indifference."

He stopped there, because the Cardinal was weeping.

"No, go on, go on," said the Cardinal. "There is nothing in this that ought to astonish me. Only, since Vittoria Colonna died, I have fallen into this foolish habit of tears."

Soon he went on, more firmly: "What really surprises me is that this gang of heretics gave you a safe-conduct."

"They would like to have you back in England, Monsignore. They would even give you back your family's estates, if you would live privately, and not interfere with their proceedings. Of course I told them there was no question of that; you'd be coming as a Cardinal or not at all. But it's odd how they cling to this notion of winning you over. Because they're not sure how they stand with the common people. And they know that the people think well of you."

"Surely, by this time, most people have forgotten."

"Oh, Monsignore, never! People who can't read make up stories and ballads about you. They say things will never be right in England until you come back to your own. And Monsignore! Everyone speaks of your mother as a martyr."

"Then why," asked the Cardinal steadily, "did they do nothing to save her?"

"That's what nobody can explain. They all tell you that it was impossible to rise against the old King. And yet none of them can say why. It's as if he had some sort of a magic power. But there's nothing magic about the power of the Seymours. So I believe the commoners *will* rise. And before very long."

The rising began in the West Country. In one village after another the people broke up the new services, held according to Cranmer's prayer book, and forced the priests to say Mass. Then they marched towards London, demanding that Cardinal Pole should be recalled to England, and made one of the King's Council.

The Seymours could not crush the rising till they brought in Lutheran mercenaries from Germany. They had intended also to seize the Cardinal's nephew, young Tom Stafford, as a hostage. But he was already on his way to Rome.

He arrived just when the Cardinal could not see him. Pope Paul III had just died and all the Cardinals were in conclave to elect a new Pope.

"Is it true they're going to elect my uncle?" the young man asked.

I said: "He's favourite in the betting."

"Betting?"

I took the lad into a banca, and showed him the clerks chalking up the latest odds. He asked: "Who are all these people pushing in and shouting?"

"Oh, jewellers, brothel-owners, keepers of gaming-houses . . . Carriage-makers too, I daresay. They all think they'll be ruined if your uncle is made Pope."

"Carriage-makers? There are thousands of carriages here, aren't there? They look splendid, with all that gilding. I wish we had carriages in London."

"They can use up the whole revenue of a bishopric," I said. "There's a law that a bishop is not to have more than twenty-five carriages, a cardinal forty or, at the most, fifty. But nobody except your uncle keeps to that."

"Why not?"

"Well, they have a saying here—'Rome makes the laws; it's for other people to *keep* them.' "

The Cardinals were strictly incommunicado, but everybody knew how they were voting. The clerks chalked up the figures:

"Pole — 24; Caraffa — 22." The rest were in ones and twos.

Tom Stafford's jaw dropped. His fair soft face (too much like the face of Sir Geoffrey Pole) became pink with excite-

"Then my uncle *must* be Pope."

"No; he has to win a two-thirds majority."

Cardinal Pole's enemies were telling scandalous tales in the conclave, and these, too instantly became known in the streets. Some servant made Tom Stafford understand them.

"Why didn't you tell me," he asked, "that I had a cousin here? What is she like? Is she pretty?"

"A cousin?"

"Yes; everybody says the Cardinal has a bastard daughter."

"You can put that out of your mind," I said.

"But they say it can be proved! He pays out money, every year, to this girl in a convent."

"I know he does," I said. "I keep his accounts. This is only one of his good deeds. A widow dying of the plague asked him to care for her daughter, and he has paid for the child's education ever since."

"What—when she's no relation?"

"Try to understand," I said, "what your uncle is like. Vittoria Colonna left him 10,000 ducats. He gave it to her niece as a dowry—every penny. When we were in Trent he received 4,000 ducats which had been owing to him for a long time. He said that as he had lived very well without it, and was not in debt, he would distribute it among all of us who worked in his household. Not that he called us together, or made a parade of it—he gave each man his fair share as opportunity arose. He said he knew that he had kept us poor, by forbidding us to take bribes."

"Then my uncle really is the best man in Rome?"

"Perhaps in the world."

"Why don't they make him Pope at once?"

"They very nearly did, but it seems your uncle insisted that, for the sake of justice, they should wait until the French cardinals arrived. It's the French cardinals who are voting against him now."

"Why?"

"Their candidate is Cardinal Caraffa, a cunning, bad-tempered old man."

"Then why should they vote for him?"

"Their king told them to. Your uncle is the Emperor's candidate."

"Is that why the French are spreading this other scandal about him?"

"What other scandal?"

"They say he's been ruling Viterbo like a man half asleep. He was so negligent, they say, that hardly any criminals have been put to death. And not one heretic. They say he's half a heretic himself."

After seventy-two days of deadlock, the cardinals from France and the Empire agreed on a candidate chosen by neither—Cardinal del Monte, a gentle old man who had gone with us to Trent. He was known to be a reformer, but in a quiet way. The harlots danced for joy in the streets of Rome because he had been chosen instead of Reginald Pole.

When young Tom Stafford at last met his uncle, he burst out into childish expressions of anger at this result.

"My dear boy!" said the Cardinal cheerfully. "You forget that, if I had been elected, I should have given up hope of ever again seeing England."

"I suppose you *have* some hope of that," said the young man. "King Edward is ill again; everybody says he can't live. So then it'll be Mary."

The Cardinal changed the conversation by asking the lad whether he had seen all the sights of Rome.

"Oh yes! Mr. Vaughan showed me everything. There's one thing he didn't explain. Perhaps you can explain it, uncle. Why does the Church teach that what happens inside a Conclave is guided by God?"

"Because it is."

"Not by the Emperor? Or the King of France?"

"These worldly powers may express their desires, and the

Cardinals, being mortal men, may enter the Conclave with such preferences in mind. But, once inside, they pray to God for guidance. And you see the result! The Pope we have elected—a most saintly man—was one thought of neither by Emperor nor by King. And I myself have never felt God's guidance more than in this Conclave. We lived together for seventy-two days like brothers; there was no quarrelling, no slander, no intrigue . . ."

"Then uncle, where did all this gossip come from, that the were spreading about you?"

"What gossip?" asked the Cardinal.

I thought of Marco Rafael's words. "How can a man be so learned, and have so little knowledge of the human heart?" He had lived all this time side by side with men who were slandering him, and had never heard one word of the slanders. Now that we had to tell him, he was much distressed.

"But Monsignore!" I said. "Nobody who knows you could believe these things. They can only discredit those who put them about."

"That is exactly what I fear," said the Cardinal. "They will discredit my dear friend, Cardinal Caraffa. And I am sure he never even heard them. They must have been spread by some of his unworthy followers."

After this he could not rest until he had met Cardinal Caraffa, in the presence of the new Pope. Caraffa said that he had had no hand in spreading the slanders, and Pole said that he believed this. Pole was telling the truth.

Soon Pole and Caraffa joined forces, in an attempt to dissuade the new Pope from making his nephew a Cardinal. The Pope agreed with all their arguments. But he could not resist the pressure of his own family, and the boy, aged seventeen, received his red hat. According to custom, Cardinal Pole wrote the new Cardinal a letter of congratulation, in his usual stately Latin.

"Were it not for the hope reasonably entertained by me, that the affection which has moved our Lord the Pope to promote your Right Reverend Lordship to the cardinalate will also induce His Holiness to use all care and diligence to protect you from all such crosses and perils as are wont to accompany dignities and high offices at such an age, I should not dare to congratulate you on this your elevation as I do . . ."

He would certainly not have promoted his own nephew, who pleased him less and less. Whenever the young man was urged to apply for readmission to the Church, he became evasive. At last he burst out: "The truth is, uncle, I'm not satisfied."

"My child!" the Cardinal said. "It is for the Church to say whether she is satisfied with you."

The following day the young man left us, saying that he had a sudden desire to see Venice. Even the Cardinal was not greatly surprised to find that his nephew owed money to various tradesmen. One debt, of three whole crowns, was for the trimming of his beard.

"At that rate," said the Cardinal, "his beard is worth more than his brain."

Though the new Pope, Julius III, had shown himself a nepotist, his first public speech was an exposition of the need for great reforms within the Church. He appointed a commission of six cardinals to carry them out, and Pole was included. Because of this new responsibility, he gave up his post at Viterbo. When we said farewell to that beautiful town, even Michael was in tears.

We now lived entirely in Rome, except for the plague-stricken summer months, which we spent at the Benedictine monastery of Maguzzano on Lake Garda. It was here, in August 1553, that we heard King Edward was dead, not having quite reached the age of sixteen.

"He died," said the Cardinal, "on the anniversary of Sir Thomas More's execution. All the lying, all the shedding

of innocent blood, all the breaking of marriage vows—everything King Henry did to get a male heir—has gone for nothing. Mary will, after all, be Queen."

Here he was reckoning without the heretic gang. (It was a *different* heretic gang, for the Seymour brothers had both been executed, but Cranmer survived). With Cranmer's blessing, a girl of fifteen had been placed on the throne—Lady Jane Grey. Her claim was a remote one. The fat old Duke of Suffolk, before he married Kate Willoughby, had been married to King Henry's sister. By her he had a son, who died, and a daughter, Frances. ("My hell-cat of a step-daughter," Kate Willoughby used to call her.) Lady Jane Grey was the daughter of this Frances.

"But if there is to be a Protestant usurper," said the Cardinal, "then surely it should be the daughter that King Henry had by Anne Boleyn—Elizabeth? Unless she is half-witted, or deformed, or in some other way notorious."

Michael remembered that he had seen Elizabeth for a few minutes, during his visit to England.

"Certainly she's got her wits about her," he said. "And she's a fine strong upright girl. Some even call her a beauty. But what they mainly say about her is—she's as strong-willed as her mother and her father rolled in one."

"That must be the trouble, then," I said. "She wouldn't be a willing tool in their hands."

The Cardinal agreed with me. "These heretics have been ruling through a child king. Now they want a child queen. God keep Mary out of their power!"

The instruments of God on this occasion, we soon heard, were Michael's nephews. Though they were heretics, they loved Mary Tudor, and they warned her just in time that the leaders of their own faction meant to seize and imprison her. Mary never lost heart. In a few days of hard riding and bold appeals to the people, she won without a fight and entered London as undisputed Queen.

As he read the letter which told him this, the Cardinal cried out: "She has proved herself the daughter of Queen Katherine, and grand-daughter of the great Queen Isabella!"

Within the hour we were preparing to return to England. The journey lasted fifteen months.

This was not the Cardinal's fault. True, he travelled slowly, taking in his baggage train his virginals, his harp, a huge painting presented to him by Signor Buonarroti, and some paintings he had bought from a Venetian artist, Tiziano Vecellio. But with all this he could have reached England in three months.

Nor was the delay due to the Pope. He appointed the Cardinal his Legate in England, with full powers to dispense the holders of monastic lands from giving them back to the Church. (The Pope knew that they would in any case not give them back, and thought it wise to win himself a name for generosity by not asking.)

The delay was the fault of Queen Mary herself, although she passionately longed to see the Cardinal. The title "Head of the Church", with which she was invested at her coronation, was odious to her, she wrote. She longed only for the moment when she could make her submission to the Pope. In the meantime, she would ask the Cardinal's advice in everything.

Unfortunately this was not quite true. She did not ask his advice about her marriage. Soon the Pope let us know that the Emperor was determined she should marry his son Philip, who was his Regent in Spain.

"Philip is twenty-six," the Cardinal said. "The Queen is thirty-seven. She will be like any other ageing heiress married to a young husband—a pitiable slave."

"Then tell her so!" I said.

"How can I?" the Cardinal said. "She has not consulted me. I am the last person she could consult, for . . . various reasons."

I thought it was time to speak plainly.

"I am sure, Monsignore, she never believed that old story, that you were plotting to marry her yourself."

"But those who are surrounding her now may believe it," said the Cardinal.

He did give his opinion to the Pope. But the Pope could see only the advantages of the marriage. It meant that Mary would have a Catholic child to succeed her, instead of a heretic sister.

We had crossed the Alps, and were some ten miles north of Dillingen, when a Spanish nobleman met us and begged us to turn back. He pleaded: "It is the Emperor's wish."

"No doubt it is!" the Cardinal said when we were alone. "The Emperor wishes to keep me out of the way until this marriage is concluded. He knows me too well to think that I would place my country in the hands of a foreigner."

He could not defy the Emperor, and so we waited in Dillingen, where the Bishop pretended that he was delighted to give us his hospitality. The pretence wore thinner as the time dragged on. I tried to learn the German tongue. The words, when you see them written, are much like our own. But they sound unlike, being rather coughed up and spat out than spoken. All I remember with pleasure of Dillingen is the warmth of the great German stoves. It is possible there for a man to take off his cloak indoors.

After two months, we had leave to proceed. It was January; we struggled on through the deep snow. At Brussels the Emperor's courtiers received us well, and lodged us in one of the best-fed monasteries I had seen. But the Emperor sent only messages that he was not well enough to see the Cardinal.

"How strange it is," the Cardinal remarked, "that I should be able, every day, to speak to God on behalf of the Emperor, and yet find it so hard to speak to the Emperor on behalf of God!"

At last we were summoned to the gloomy palace. I had heard of the Emperor Charles V as a handsome man. But now he looked bloated and gouty. He sat with his feet up on a chair, to show that his illness had been real.

In harsh, guttural French he begged the Cardinal to sit beside him. He felt nothing but good will, he insisted; this long delay was for the Cardinal's own safety. The time was not yet ripe for him to go to England. Then, to prove the strength of the Protestants, the Emperor told us that news had just come from England of a revolt against the Queen's proposed marriage. The rebels had marched out of Kent, to the very gates of London.

"Their leader," said the Emperor, "is a gentleman of some standing, Sir Thomas Wyatt, whose father I knew as English Ambassador to Toledo. In your country he was a famous poet."

"And a famous murderer, if he had had his way," said the Cardinal. "As Your Majesty may remember, he hired men to lie in wait for me outside Toledo. No doubt his son is like him."

"They say that the Londoners will open their gates to this Wyatt," said the Emperor.

"Your Majesty is misinformed. The Londoners, like most Englishmen, are Catholics at heart, and loyal to Queen Mary."

The next day's letters bore this out. Mary, we heard, had refused to leave Whitehall, even when a battle was raging at her doors. Wearing a man's breastplate, she rallied her bodyguard when they fell back. She told her ladies not to shriek; if they could not fight, they must pray. The gates of the City were locked against the rebels; the Londoners came out only to fight for Queen Mary. At last Sir Thomas Wyatt, finding himself alone, sat down in Fleet Street and was taken prisoner.

The Emperor received the Cardinal again, with even

more politeness, but still begged him to wait. "Stay another two months . . . or three."

The Cardinal said he would gladly employ this time in a mission he had from the Pope, which was to negotiate a peace between the Emperor and the King of France.

At this the Emperor's manner became colder. His reasons for being at war with France, he said, were well known. Nobody wanted peace more than he did. But the French must first give up their conquests in Flanders, and their protection of Parma and Siena. (I thought: Poor Italy!) If the Cardinal really wanted peace, he should be talking to the French King.

The Cardinal took this as if it were well meant, and set off to see King Henri II. We had safe-conducts through the battle lines, which were still frozen into a truce by the snow. In early spring we arrived at Fontainebleau and were lodged in a wing of the new palace.

This palace is built in the Italian style, for all other countries aspire to be Italy. But up and down the double staircase, through the fountained courts, about the gardens, flowed a life which was all French. Why did I feel almost as much at ease here as in England?

It was, I thought, because of the young girls. Not locked up, not subdued into stupidity, they revelled in the court, as the court revelled in their beauty and high spirits. They were not so free as they appeared; there was always an older woman watching. But a Frenchwoman, even an old one, makes a gay duenna.

The courtiers flocked round us, asking for news of Italian fashions. King Henri II himself welcomed the Cardinal like a long-lost brother. The only person left out of the gaiety was Michael—baffled, as always, by the foreigners' habit of talking their own tongue. The Cardinal sent him to England, with letters for the Queen.

I had work enough, writing letters in Spanish to the Queen's future husband. But it was hard to think of work in such a

court. Once, in our apartments, I looked out of a window, and saw below in the garden the little Queen of Scotland practising the steps of a pavane. Her instructress was that famous lady, Diane de Poitiers. That a woman who moved with such light and liquid grace should be past fifty seemed incredible. About her and the child the garden blossomed, and beyond the garden the forest was touched with spring.

The Cardinal joined me at the window. He murmured: "What a terrible lesson for the child."

I remarked that it did not seem an immodest dance.

"What the child is learning," he said, "is to pay court to the reigning goddess, who is not the King's wife, but his concubine."

The reigning goddess . . . And who but a goddess could look so elegant all in black? (A colour which had never been permitted at old King Henry's court). These Frenchwomen made whatever they touched into grace. They had adopted the Venetian fashion of wearing a two-legged garment under their skirts, but even this had become something silky and light. I found this out because, though I was now past forty, and lined about the eyes, I had not lost the art of making a woman take off her clothes.

I knew better, of course, than to touch the unmarried girls. But among the married women there were some whose husbands neglected them sadly . . . The one I chose was young, and at first made me feel young. But I came to know that I was growing old, because all the necessary devices—the bribes to servant girls, the visits to the house of some accommodating friend, the cloaks, the masks, the disguises—now seemed to me insufferably tedious. Even more tedious was the conversation. Preachers, when they warn us, ought to say that if you sin with a woman you will have to hear her talk.

This one's talk was all court gossip, one long story of midnight abortions, of new-born babies found buried in the forest, of women who died young because they had got up from

secret childbeds to show themselves at court. My mistress had no doubt that the late King François had died of the pox. The question that she endlessly revolved was this—which ladies had caught it from him?

I began to wonder . . . If I had been married, all these years, to Margaret, what would we have talked about? About our son, and how he was growing, and what he was learning. I had to break into my own day-dream, to remind myself that my son, if he were alive, would be poor and therefore learning nothing. Probably he could not read.

I began to be oppressed by the stink of Fontainebleau. No palace I have seen, except those built by old King Henry, has enough privies . . . Once more I longed for England. If only God would let me see it again, I thought, I would give up lechery, marry some good English girl, and lead an honest life . . .

The Cardinal, too, was becoming impatient to leave. Nothing could be more charming than the King's manner. He assured the Cardinal that, if only he had known him earlier, he would have told the French cardinals to vote for him as Pope. Then he professed himself ready to make peace with the Emperor at once. Or almost at once. The Emperor must first give up Milan . . . There followed a list of demands, each one more impossible than the last. And yet each one was made gently, with a smile.

When the Cardinal suggested more acceptable terms, the King said he would consider the matter . . . after the next day's hunting or after the next court ball.

The Cardinal appealed to the Queen, Caterina de' Medici, whose heart he won by speaking Italian.

"You could have your peace tomorrow," she said, "if it depended on me. But you know that what I say counts for nothing."

The Cardinal resolutely refused to pay court to Diane de Poitiers. She reminded him of Anne Boleyn.

While we were at Fontainebleau Tom Stafford, more pink and soft than ever, suddenly presented himself at our apartments. His uncle invited him to sit by him at dinner, and did not mention those unpaid debts in Rome. He said only: "I see that you still keep your beard well trimmed."

"Yes, I thought it would suit me like this," the young man replied.

He was full of some scheme he had for preventing the Queen's marriage. "And uncle, since I heard you were against it—"

"Who says I am against it?"

"Everybody."

"The Queen has already signed the marriage contract," said the Cardinal. "Do you think I would ask her to break her pledged word? If I thought a marriage, once made, could be lightly broken, I need not have lived an exile from my country these twenty years and more."

"But this marriage is putting England into the hands of a foreigner! We shall have this Spaniard altering our laws, making Englishmen fight for him against France—"

"If there was ever any fear of that, it has been removed by the terms of the marriage contract. Don Philip has pledged himself to respect the decisions of Parliament, and not to require any help from England in time of war."

"But uncle, do you believe he'll keep his word? If you do, you're the only one who does. The whole English people hate this marriage."

"It may have escaped your attention," the Cardinal said, "that Wyatt's rebellion was put down. And put down by Englishmen; unlike the Protestants, this Queen did not need to bring in foreign mercenaries."

"Yes, well, that Wyatt business was completely mishandled. Our own movement is much better and stronger. We have the real nobility on our side."

"Who, for example?"

"Well, there's the dowager Duchess of Suffolk . . ."

"You mean Mrs. Bertie?" inquired the Cardinal coldly. "The woman has married her steward."

At this I felt a small, disloyal pang of joy. Remembering little Kate Willoughby, and her marriage to the fat old Duke, I was glad that she had pleased herself once he was dead.

Tom Stafford's face was growing pinker, his voice louder. He thrust out his beard, trying to show himself a man.

"Then let Mary Tudor be married!" he said. "But let her not be Queen! Who are the Tudors? Only some adventurers who seized the throne! *Our* claim, through the House of York—"

"Out of my sight!" said the Cardinal. Because he said it quietly, the young man did not believe he meant it, and tried to go on talking. The Cardinal rose.

"If you do not go, I must," he said. "I will not sit at the same table with you. What! Do you not know what we have already suffered, for this dream, this fancy, of a claim to the throne? My wretched uncle, who never put the claim forward, nor had the wit to do so, was butchered in his innocence, thinking the beheading a game of blind man's buff. My brothers were arrested as much for their nearness to the King as their nearness to me. And my cousin who was beheaded, and his child, young Courtenay, only now released, and my brother's child Henry Pole who never can be released, because he died in the Tower—they were all victims of their own royal blood. And my mother—what crime did she ever commit, except to be born Margaret Plantagenet? Are you not ashamed, when you think that my mother looks down, a blessed martyr in Heaven? She died innocent; you mean to die a guilty traitor."

It was my task to speed the young man on his way. He told me, in a very defiant manner, that he was not going far. Whatever his uncle might say, the French King was pleased with him, and had promised him a pension "so long as I hold myself ready".

I reported this to the Cardinal, and he begged the King not to give the lad any encouragement.

The King, smiling, said that of course he would not. There must be some foolish misunderstanding.

The Cardinal returned to the subject of peace. The summer's campaigning had already begun.

"Yes," replied the King with a smile, "and it's going well for our boys."

"But people are being killed!" the Cardinal said.

"You must come to Paris!" said the King. "Next week we shall all move to Paris; this place is becoming unsavoury. And then you'll be able to see what we're doing to suppress heresy. My late father King François—the most virtuous of men—showed the heretics a gentleness which amounted almost to . . ." he dropped his voice " . . . toleration. Still, I've done my best to put matters right. You know about our new court, the Chambre Ardente? . . . But did you know how many heretics we've actually burned!"

"The suppression of heresy," said the Cardinal, "is a matter for people with clean hands. It can never be done by rulers who make war for their personal glory and greed, nor by those whose private sins have given their people an evil example."

"Indeed!" said the King, still smiling. Some courtier began to talk of the deer killed that day.

When we left, a few days later, the King was as charming as ever. He has not, I think, since then, let slip one opportunity of harming the Cardinal.

Our safe-conducts took us through the battle-lines, but only God protected us from the stray cannon-balls. The towns were in ruins; the very earth seemed to smoke. At first Flanders appeared unpeopled; but soon, from cellars and holes, crawled wretched, ragged, starving creatures. They kissed the Cardinal's hands; in the country places they strewed flowers in his path. Where the churches were still standing they rang the church bells. All this was because

they had heard that the Cardinal meant to make peace.

The Cardinal murmured: "My nephew wants to bring England to this condition."

There was no peace. The Emperor received us brusquely, and rudely interrupted the Cardinal's account of the negotiations in France. It was enough that he had spent so long with the French King. That proved him an enemy. He had better go back to Rome.

The Cardinal said he was not going anywhere but England. We spent the summer becalmed in our dull monastery. At last, four months after the wedding of Philip and Mary, when it was reported that the Queen was pregnant, the Emperor let us go. Parliament, with no trouble, reversed the attainders against us all.

And so, on a cold November night, we came to Calais. As the English Governor there feasted us at his table, the captain of his guard reported that the password was: "Long lost and found again." But what we had waited for so long was the next day.

Then, as we set sail, the weak sunshine broke the mists, and showed us our own country. We knelt down upon the deck. The Cardinal prayed aloud, sonorously, in Latin. I prayed in English. "Oh, my patron saint, St. Thomas, who doubted and then believed, remember that I have not yet made full atonement for my sins! Let me, somewhere in this country, find Margaret and my son!"

# 12

As we rode in triumph through Dover, with all the bells ringing, a woman ran out of a doorway crying: "God bless you!" Her husband ran after her and tried to drag her back. When she still cried out: "God bless you!" he began to beat her. At her screams, the people laughed. I heard someone say: "There's a right Protestant! Does his preaching with a stick!" But nobody tried to stop him.

I had forgotten what a common thing this was in England. Perhaps Margaret's husband beat her, and the neighbours laughed.

The thought made me wild. I turned my horse's head round, and went nosing into the crowd, and took the stick out of the man's hand.

"Now that's not right!" someone said. "To come between husband and wife."

Looking round at them all, I saw that England now had as many pox-eaten faces as Italy. But one face, a clean healthy face, leaned out from a window, and cried: "Hurrah!" I took off my hat, and bowed.

The face dodged back behind the shutters, too late. I rode to the door beneath the window—it was a poor common inn—and asked if I might speak to the Duchess of Suffolk.

"There's no duchess here," said the innkeeper.

"Mrs. Bertie, then," I said. "Or Kate Willoughby."

She came flying down the stairs and drew me into the dark hall, and, with her arms entwined about my neck, whispered: "Oh, Tom, you won't betray us, will you? We're only trying to leave the country—is that so very wicked?"

I swore I would do nothing to harm her, and did not at once consider how far this was consistent with my loyalty to the Cardinal. She was a notorious heretic. But I could feel only delight at meeting an Englishwoman, free with her kisses and her laughter, honest in her speech.

"Richard *told* me not to put my head out of the window," she said. "But you know, curiosity . . . And if you really won't give us away, there's no harm done. Come and tell Richard it's all right."

She led me upstairs to a little, low, whitewashed room, and presented me to a gentleman who blinked at me uneasily through spectacles. I could not meet him without a pang of jealousy, for at thirty-four the Duchess was a very handsome

"The Queen is so angry with me for marrying Richard!" she said. "That's why she wouldn't give me a passport to go abroad. But don't you think I've earned a little happiness? Oh, Tom, do you know what my life has been? My two sons died in one summer—God knows I wished I could have died to save them. I was left with nobody in the world. Not even a friend. Not even your poor countess—do you remember her? She was so much in love with you, and we all pretended not to know. Well! She's dead. Look, how he crosses himself! Oh, a good end. Repentant . . . And Katherine Parr, who married the wicked old King, and had four years of Purgatory . . . Did you know he burned her friends, almost before her face? He burned poor beautiful Anne Askew, who taught me Greek. Well, when he died, Kate Parr thought she could be happy at last, and she married Tom Seymour, and a year after she was dead in childbirth. Which perhaps will happen to me."

She patted her belly. Her husband kissed her and said God would bring her through safely. "We mean to call the child Peregrine," he said. "Because he will be born during our peregrinations."

"Peregrinations!" repeated the Duchess fondly. "The *words* my Richard knows!" Then again she was almost in tears. "Oh, let it be born where it likes, let it be boy or girl, if only I could see one child grow up! Kate Parr's little girl, that she died giving birth to, is dead as well, you know. She was like my own to me; I brought her up from the beginning, and she was only five—Oh, Tom, I can't talk about it!"

I asked her if her mother too was dead.

"Oh, yes, years ago. Poor mother! We never could agree. She hated you, Tom; she thought you weren't a true Catholic. Which I suppose you must have been, in spite of everything. Mother would have been so pleased, to see you with your Cardinal!"

The scorn she put into the last words made me say: "The Cardinal wants reform as much as you do."

At this they both laughed.

"Truly," I said, "he is here only for reconciliation. He has already been a good deal slandered at Rome, for his gentleness to Protestants."

"We heard all this," Kate said, "when the Queen came to the throne. Nothing in her mouth but mercy! Then why did she send poor little Jane Grey to the scaffold? Jane Grey—my stepdaughter's child. She was not sixteen years old when her wicked parents tried to make her Queen. Why should Queen Mary kill her, and then pardon her evil bitch of a mother? She'll come to no good, this Queen, if she executes the wrong people."

"All things considered," Richard Bertie said, "we think we should leave the country."

"You won't try to stop us?" Kate put in. "Truly?"

"If the Queen takes any measures against you," I said,

"I shall remind her that your mother comforted *her* mother on her deathbed."

"Oh yes!" Kate cried out. "Why didn't *I* think of that? I never say the right words, the words that could soften people. I've made so many enemies! And yet, you know, I don't believe it's all my fault. England has changed, Tom. You won't like it now. Everybody's grown so stiff and sad. Even our own friends—even the reformers. They aren't happy people, full of spirit, like Anne Askew. They're narrow, and dull, and they have bitter little quarrels about whether to wear vestments—that sort of thing. Oh, sad, sad, sad!"

I left her, promising once again not to betray her hiding-place, and spurred on to rejoin the Cardinal. Kate Willoughby must be blinded by zealotry, I thought, to see sadness in the chorus of rejoicing which accompanied us all the way to Canterbury. At every village the people surrounded us, and begged us to look at their poor desecrated churches, where not a pyx was left, not a gilt candlestick; where even the paintings on the walls had been spoiled with whitewash, by the Protestant zealots of Edward's time.

At Canterbury the cathedral bells were ringing, and all the great men of the town turned out to meet us. But I believe that the Cardinal took most pleasure in seeing Michael, who came from London to tell him that Lambeth Palace was now in readiness to be his permanent home. He was to have a house in Canterbury too, but it was not yet ready, being full of Cranmer's lumber. (Cranmer was now in the Tower.)

I told Michael of the Cardinal's trouble with his nephew.

"Nothing to the trouble I've had with mine," said Michael. "My eldest nephew, that is—Nicholas Throgmorton, the worst heretic of the lot. It's true he helped the Queen when she first came in, but then he talked so foolishly that he was suspected of knowing in advance about Wyatt's rebellion. He was put on trial for high treason. I thought it was all up with him. Who ever heard of a man accused of high treason

being acquitted? Not in old Harry's time, no, nor in Edward's, neither. But you know what my nephew did? He reminded the judge of the speech the Queen made to all her judges, when she came to the throne. He'd got it all written down. You see, the Queen told them the old ways were wrong. They weren't to stop the prisoner speaking, or prevent him calling witnesses. They weren't to twist the law in the Queen's favour. Those were the Queen's own words; the judge couldn't deny it. Then my nephew called his witness, a gentleman of the Queen's household, who gave evidence that my nephew had been with him all the time of Wyatt's rebellion. So the jury found him not guilty. And you know what the judge did? Sent my nephew to prison, and the jury with him! It wasn't that he had anything against poor Nicholas. He just couldn't abide this new notion—that a man accused of high treason should be let off. But the Queen set Nicholas free, *and* the jury, when she heard of it."

"This Queen sounds like a good-hearted woman."

"None better! But the trouble is—what sort of people can she get to serve her? Gardiner! Well, he's a clever man; he can twist the others round his little finger at the council table. But it's—what?—seven years ago he was all for hanging, drawing and quartering anyone who said a word in favour of the Pope. Now he's just as fierce on the other side. Keeps on at the Queen to execute her sister."

"What—Elizabeth?"

"Elizabeth knew something about Wyatt's rebellion. And she's been getting secret letters from the King of France. The Queen had to send her to the Tower for a while. More than that she would not do. You see, to her Elizabeth is still the baby that she taught to walk. Besides! Can you imagine what she feels when she hears her Privy Counsellors asking for Elizabeth's blood? She knows that these are the very same men who were telling her father to cut off *her* head. No wonder that she's longing to see the Cardinal! The one Englishman she can trust."

"What's this King Philip like?" I asked.

Michael made a face. "Pale. Squat. Carroty. Doesn't smile much. The Queen likes him."

I saw this for myself, two days later. The Cardinal's barge, with a great silver cross on the prow, sailed from Gravesend to London, escorted by a thousand noblemen and gentlemen in their own barges, flying flags and pennants. As we neared London, the citizens came out in little boats to join our procession. We shot London Bridge, and at Southwark we were joined by Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, in his own richly ornamented barge.

And so we came in triumph to Whitehall stairs. The King and Queen, who had not expected us so soon, were at dinner. But they came out at once to do honour to the Cardinal.

When I saw them all three talking together, the happiness on the Queen's face was frightful to me. We like to think of women in love as young. What right has a woman of thirty-eight, so ravaged by grief and illness that she looks much older, to show in every movement of her body an overmastering passion? This girl, whose hand had once touched mine as coldly as if it were the hand of another woman, now (while she talked so piously to the Cardinal) let her greedy fingers grope for her husband's hand. When she had found it, she squeezed it as if she could never bear to let it go. I heard one of King Philip's Spanish attendants mutter: "I know whose hand he'd rather be holding now."

From their other conversation (which the Spaniards thought I did not understand) I soon learned that King Philip had a mistress, to whom he was longing to return. He must have had great self-command; I never, then or later, saw him treat the Queen with anything but kindness.

The Queen showed no sign of remembering me, which I thought lucky. But when the Cardinal pointed me out as a gentleman who had shared his exile, she beckoned me and let me kiss her hand.

It was then I heard the Cardinal say to her, softly, in Latin: "Blessed be the fruit of thy womb!" She replied (with a shyness which, in a younger woman, would have been charming) that until now she had not been quite sure, but "at the sight of you, my dear Father-in-God" the babe had leaped in her womb.

And suddenly I thought: *It is not true. She is deceiving herself.*

Why I thought so I could not explain. She carried herself like a woman in that state; her thin body held her belly forward with a sort of reverence. And yet I thought: *This will all come to nothing.*

Now that I was near her, I could see how ill she looked—much more ill than when I had last seen her, twenty-one years before. And I remembered Lady Salisbury's words. In those days, when Mary was an undoubted virgin, she had shown the signs of pregnancy.

A week afterwards, on that great day when King, Queen Lords and Commons kneeled before the Cardinal, and made their submission to the Church—then, when the dim torchlit air was full of the sound of sobbing, and all those present vowed themselves to a new beginning—even then I was haunted by a vision of barren soil.

That I was not long afterwards proved right, that there was no child, may have been the Queen's worst grief, but to the Cardinal it was only one of a long series of troubles. Michael was right; there was not one judge or counsellor fit to carry out the Queen's good intentions. For herself, she followed her conscience, giving her own abbey lands back to the Church. But when she urged her counsellors to follow her example, Lord Russell tore the rosary from his girdle, and flung it into the fire. He said: "I think more of my sweet Abbey of Woburn than of any fatherly counsel from Rome!"

Once the Queen was so maddened by her Council's obstinacy that she cried out: "I wish my father were alive for a month!" The thought made them turn pale. But in a moment

they grew unruly again. She was helpless without the advice of the Cardinal. He had to tell her the most simple things, as that it was useless for her Council to make decisions, unless they also made sure that the decisions of the previous week had been carried out. But he did not himself sit on the Council, respecting the prejudices of Englishmen against Papal interference.

As for Spanish interference, it was not as we had imagined. England was still a country without soldiers, and King Philip had brought no more with him than his personal bodyguard. What he desired, no doubt, was done; but it was done by Englishmen. The Queen would have taken his advice in everything; but once he saw the Catholic religion well established, he had not much concern with England. Soon he found urgent business to take him to Brussels. The Queen became so ill that she spent days together sitting on the floor, trying to ease her agony by keeping her knees higher than her head. But still she found the strength to write to her beloved husband; still she insisted on sending him copies of all state papers. For his benefit, I had to translate into Spanish the Cardinal's plans for the reform of the Church.

". . . Enacting also, in accordance with the general decree of the Lateran Council, that no one hereafter in this kingdom shall dare to print, or cause to be printed, any book or other matter in writing, under pain of the penalties contained in the decree, and others still severer, as the degree of the offence may require, until it has first been carefully read and examined by the Bishop . . .

"We also renew, and in every point command to carry into execution, all censures and penalties enacted against heretics and their supporters, as also against bishops and all others to whom this relates, who are remiss in extirpating heresies."

When I showed my translation to the Cardinal, I asked him whether he meant these phrases to sound so severe. They seemed at variance with his teaching and practice at Viterbo.

"God grant we never have to use these powers!" he said. "But we must have them in reserve. Parliament has agreed by an overwhelming majority to revive the old laws against heresy. The Queen must have some weapons against all these rebels. You know, Tom, the King of France is pouring money into England, to encourage the plotters on behalf of Elizabeth."

Then he began to ask me about the household accounts. Michael was having disputes every day with servants, who thought that some cheating, drunkenness and waste were proper parts of any great establishment. It was my task to make the books balance, which I did after the Italian fashion—regarded by these honest English gluttons as an invention of the devil. If the Cardinal hated waste, they said, why was he building a long gallery only to keep some Italian pictures in?

Whether keeping accounts, translating, or going to court with the Cardinal (who needed me when he met the Spaniards) I had work enough to do. But I found a few hours, once, for business of my own.

The goldsmith in Lombard Street did not know me behind my beard. I scarcely knew him; he no longer worked in gold, and his shop had become what the Italians call a *banca*—a place for the safe keeping and lending of money. When I showed him letters to prove that I was really Thomas Vaughan, he invited me into a little back room.

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you," he said. "Your money stopped coming in after Lord Cromwell was arrested."

"I had quite a hoard here before that," I said. "I suppose you had to surrender it all to the King, when I was attainted."

"When you were *what*?"

"Attainted for treason, for following Cardinal Pole. It's been reversed now, of course."

"Then thank the Lord I never heard of it!" the goldsmith said. "It must have been cried at Paul's Cross, I suppose. But how can a man keep track of so many changes? Besides, I had all your money lent out, at very good rates. No, as the Lord

is my judge, I never heard anyone say I should give it up to the King."

"Then it's all still here?"

"Lent out, you know, lent out. If you want it, you'll have to give me a week's notice." He consulted a ledger. "I could let you have ten pounds or so at once, and this golden bowl you left with me for safe keeping. But the bulk of the money, which, with compound interest, now amounts to six hundred and twelve pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence—."

"Six hundred pounds!" I repeated. It was a fortune. I could marry almost any girl in England. Why not? I was forty-one, my beard as black as ever, and my temples only a little grey.

If I told the Cardinal of this money, he might, I thought, argue that it was ill-gotten, and that I ought to give it up to the Church. I did not want to find myself using words as desperate as Lord Russell's.

I had to tell the truth to someone. I told Michael. He kissed me on both cheeks and cried out: "Then we're both rich! The Queen has given me back all the property Cromwell seized when I went into exile. Tom, can this goldsmith of yours arrange for the sending of money into another country? There's a . . . person in Italy I want to help."

This put my conscience on another track. I ought to give some of my money to Margaret, and my son. I had already sent a servant to Thaxted, to ask if anyone there had heard of Joseph the carpenter. Some remembered the name, but nobody could say where he had gone. As opportunity arose, I had inquiries made at other villages, which I knew Cromwell had owned. But the servants reported that village people were grown so strange there was no getting any sense out of them. It was as if they were all intent on hiding some heresy.

Margaret's image grew brighter in my memory, when I saw how hard it was to find a wife. I could not find a girl I thought worthy to share my six hundred pounds. The women at court

were all too strange, too still, not like the bouncing girls of King Henry's day. I could see now what Kate Willoughby had meant. "Sad, sad, sad!" The young men, too, had grown as formal as the Spaniards. When I was young, men were not ashamed of laughing out loud, or weeping. Now nobody laughed unless the Queen did, and she laughed only at acrobats. As for weeping—I saw one little page, a lad not fifteen, shedding tears for his father's death. His companions told him: "Don't be a woman!" But at court not even the women seemed ever to weep.

I found a lady weeping in the Cardinal's ante-chamber—weeping, and holding up her hands, and crying to Heaven for justice, as ladies used to do. Though she was not young I looked at her with admiration, thinking that this was the sort of wife I wanted a woman with some spirit. Still, the noise was terrible and was attracting the servants, who stood just outside the door, peeping. So I tried to calm the lady, telling her that the Cardinal would no doubt give her justice, if it lay within his power.

"To everyone else he will," she said. "But not to his own sister! Not to his poor family!"

This, then, was Ursula, Lady Stafford, the mother of young Tom Stafford. "Were you with my brother at Fontainebleau?" she asked me. "Did you see him turn my boy into the street?"

I did not have to answer, for she went on: "And it's all of a piece! He has never even asked what became of that other poor boy—his nephew and mine—Henry Pole, the son of Lord Montague. They say he died in the Tower. Simply died. I'd fetch the Tower wardens one by one; I'd put them on their own racks; I'd make them tell me what happened."

The Cardinal came out of his room, looking weary. His sister threw her arms around his neck; he gently disengaged himself.

"Ursula!" he said. "This time, try to understand. I must not show any favour to my own family."

"Who says you must not? Not the Queen! You rule her now the King's away. You're the one man she trusts."

"Then, for that very reason, I must not abuse her trust. Ursula! This is what I have been struggling against—this old, bad system which brought the Church into disrepute. God willing, we shall never again see a Pope make his nephew a Cardinal."

"I never asked you to make Tom a Cardinal. I only want you to tell the Queen that he ought by rights to be Duke of Buckingham, because my late husband's father . . ."

The Cardinal said: "Please go home."

"At least, at least you could ask for the Earldom of Warwick. It belongs to you by rights, because our uncle . . ."

"This gentleman will conduct you home," said the Cardinal turning to me.

Still she would not go. She began: "I beg you, by the soul of our murdered mother . . ."

The Cardinal trembled so that he could not speak.

I had the happy thought of suggesting that I should read through a great bundle of Cromwell's letters, recently discovered in the Royal Archives. They might show what had happened to the son of Lord Montague. To this the Cardinal agreed, and his sister left us in peace for a while.

Reading these letters took me a long time, for I still had all my other tasks. Besides, the Cardinal insisted that I should make notes, not only of what concerned his family, but of any other apparent injustice.

But these, it proved, were nearly all letters *to* Cromwell, and they were concerned with everyday business, not secrets. My own reports on Queen Katherine were missing. Had Cromwell, then, destroyed all secret documents, or hidden them in some place where they could not be found?

Sometimes I came on a phrase I remembered. "Thomas Crumvell, thought to be a kinsman . . ." He was the squire

of some Essex village now; I had heard of him because he was so active in seeking out heretics.

I did not find what I secretly longed to find. There was no record of Joseph the Carpenter, or the sewing maid Margaret, or the smallholding Cromwell had given them. As for young Henry Pole, all I found was a note in Cromwell's writing, dated November 1539. "To remember the two children in the Tower." One child was young Courtenay, now released; the other must be Henry Pole. So he was then still alive.

Next came Cromwell's own letters from the Tower, to the King. ". . . Most gracious prince, I cry for mercy, mercy, mercy."

These letters, though they sometimes made me weep, gave me a sort of pleasure. They were written in the English tongue, as I remembered it. For even this was changing; new-fangled words were daily made out of foreign ones, and if they were long, they grew fashionable. When I was young a spy was a spy simply, but now a spy working for our side was called; "An espial." A trusty spy was "A credible espiäl."

In April 1555, when I heard that Pope Julius III had died, I felt suddenly homesick for Rome . . . But this time the new Pope was chosen quickly, and, almost as quickly, died. Again a choice was made without delay. It was Cardinal Caraffa, now to be known as Paul IV. Pole smiled, remembering how he and Caraffa had sat up all night trying to persuade Julius III not to promote his nephew.

At the end of June we heard that Caraffa had made his own nephew a Cardinal. Carlo Caraffa was not, certainly, a boy of seventeen, but a famous leader of condottieri, a man "steeped in blood to the elbows" I had heard his uncle say.

"They say he has been converted to a pious way of living. I shall have to write the usual letter of congratulation," said Cardinal Pole.

He was looking very ill. In the damp air of England he was

a prey to ague, which we now called by its Italian name—malaria.

And yet he could not leave off working. Who else was to decide—for example—what should be done with Cranmer?

This former Archbishop had joined in so many plots against the Queen that he might have been charged with high treason. But, to Queen and Cardinal alike, this did not seem enough. What they wanted to discredit was not his recent plotting, but his whole life. He had pretended a religious purpose, when he pronounced King Henry's divorce from Katherine. He had set himself up as teacher and prophet, when he forced his English prayer-book on the people. It was decided, therefore, to charge him with heresy.

This did not make the trial more interesting. There were long, tedious arguments about transubstantiation. The Cardinal took no direct part in the trial, but, after Cranmer had been found guilty, he wrote him a letter urging him to repent. If King Philip did not read this letter it was not my fault; I spent hours enough translating it into Spanish.

"Could I not utter curses against a man who took his King out of the Church where he was so eminent, and where all honest people saw him with so much joy? For do not say that you used nothing but the force of eloquence, that you used neither violence nor strength to win him over. Did the Devil use anything but evil counsel (and what is there, indeed, stronger or more dangerous?) to drive the first man out of the Earthly Paradise? You imitated this serpent, you employed every ruse to destroy the King and the Kingdom and all the Church, to make so many thousand men perish in every way, for are you not guilty of all the evils which have happened in England? . . ."

When I reached this point I went to see the Cardinal.

"My Lord!" I said. "Should you not show some charity to this man, as you have done to me? I know he helped King Henry to commit his crimes, but so did I. And at least he

pleaded for the victims when he dared. He is a poor, timid, boot-licking creature; he never, in his own person, hurt a soul."

"Thank you for reminding me of that," the Cardinal said. "It is a point I ought to mention."

He revised his draft, so that it now included the words:

"Do not say for excuse that you never killed anybody, that you treated everyone with great gentleness and kindness, for I know this is what people say. But do these people know what they are saying? Perhaps you yourself believe that you never killed anyone, that you did not take the leadership of the flock of Christ with any such intention, and that since you took it you have had no desire to shed blood, but your conscience deceives you . . ."

I still thought this not very charitable, but what shook me to the soul was the theological argument. In these matters I had always trusted the Cardinal; he, after all, had spent many years in studying theology.

What he wrote to Cranmer was that, in the Mass, the priest's words turned the bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ. Cranmer was refusing to believe this doctrine, therefore God's grace had departed from him. And the proof that God's grace had departed from him was this, that he went on refusing to believe the doctrine . . .

If I, who had not been much trained in logic, could see that this was arguing in a circle, why did not the Cardinal see it?

There were two other arguments. Cranmer ought to believe the doctrine because it was believed by men more learned than himself. And he ought to believe it because God did not reveal the truth to learned men, only to those willing to become as little children.

If the other was a circle, this was a flat contradiction. The same arguments were endlessly repeated. Circle followed contradiction, contradiction followed circle, through the thousands upon thousands of words I translated.

In all the years I had followed the Cardinal, I had never seen him moved by any common ambition. Riches were nothing to him; power he desired only as a means to propagate his faith. It was faith, I knew, that had sustained him; and my faith in his faith sustained me. But now that he came to expound this faith, where was it? The sentence of death on Cranmer might be justified, but what could justify this emptiness?

The one thing I found to reassure me in this letter was a promise—or what looked like a promise.

"It is only in reflecting on all I say to you, in repenting of your many crimes, of the many evils you have caused, that you can come out of prison, deliver yourself from the gloom which surrounds you, recover the light, and obtain pardon."

Cranmer wrote not one, but six recantations. Yet the Queen would not pardon him.

"She believes that he is not sincere," the Cardinal explained. "And I am sure she is right. It would make a mockery of the law, if a scoundrel could escape it by pleading submission, while a heretic who told the truth about his belief went to the fire."

"But my Lord!" I said. "That is just what is happening. That is why there are tumults in the City every time a heretic is burned. The people see these poor ignorant weavers and maidservants, who have not the art to conceal their beliefs, going bravely to a cruel death. And yet men like Cromwell—the men who knew how to change sides in time—go unpunished."

"Then what are we to do?" the Cardinal said. "You surely cannot mean that heresy is not to be punished at all."

Though I saw him every day, it was growing harder and harder for me to talk to him. He was always haggard and withdrawn as if, besides his many cares, he had some secret cause of anguish. But I had never seen him paler than at the end of April 1557, when he told me: "The Protestants are

making another attempt at a rising. Backed by the King of France, as usual. But the man . . ." His voice grew so flat and dull that I could hardly hear it, ". . . the man leading the invasion is my nephew, Thomas Stafford."

This invasion found no support among the people. Young Stafford could not even hold Scarborough, where he landed. Within a week he was a prisoner, on his way to the Tower.

The Cardinal consented to see his sister, but only once, and then only to tell her that he could not save her son. He would not even try. How could he ask the Queen to show mercy to a man who appeared in arms against her? It made no difference, and must make no difference, that the man was his nephew.

"Why not?" shrieked Ursula. "Is it a sin, to have some natural feeling?"

"God knows I am as grieved as you are, but—"

"What do you know about grief? All you think of is maintaining your own tyranny. That's what you are—a tyrant! And a worse one than old Harry. At least he refused to kill his own daughter. Tyrant! Tyrant!"

I pitied the poor woman, but what I chiefly thought about was how she could be got out of the house.

"For God's sake, Ursula," said the Cardinal gently, "send your chaplain to the boy. Make sure he becomes a good Catholic, before he dies."

At that she fainted. Michael and I, with all gentleness, carried her out and laid her under the awning of her own barge. Her boatmen, who had been a long time waiting in the cold (the landing stage of Lambeth Palace catches all the winds of the river) were glad enough to take her home.

Ursula's words about the Cardinal's lack of natural feeling were echoed by the servants of his own household. He did not hear them. He did not hear even the ballad singers, who mocked his nephew as "The King of Scarborough." He had another preoccupation.

It was clear that young Stafford's revolt had been for the sake of young Stafford, not for Elizabeth. So she was now better trusted, and often appeared at court. It was to me a strange and haunted pleasure to watch this daughter of Anne Boleyn leap in a dance. She had the same turn of the head, the same slender neck. But her hair was like her father's reddish gold. And from her slender body came a deep man's laugh—*his* laugh. Every gossip in the court could tell you how that laugh roused King Philip from his glooms. He was now back in England, because he wanted English levies to fight for him against France. Under the marriage contract, he could not have them without the consent of the Queen. She did not refuse to levy troops for him; she did not refuse him anything.

For his pleasure, she concealed her continual pain and made the court almost gay. There were even plays, presented and written by an English actor called Heywood, a man with better morals than Machiavelli, but less wit. After one performance I met some of Elizabeth's ladies on the stairs, and began to tell them of the plays I had seen in Italy. Then I heard that deep laugh. Elizabeth was listening. I surpassed myself in the finding of delicate phrases for bawdy tales.

Elizabeth spoke to me in Italian, enjoying my surprise at her accomplishment. When I complimented her on the correctness of her grammar, she said: "Oh, I had to learn! The Duke of Ferrara sent men to woo me for his son. They told me such tales of palaces and vines! But after all I thought England was the best place. Was I right?"

I assured her I thought so. Then I became aware (for at court you become aware of what happens behind your back) that King Philip was approaching us, with a scowl on his pallid face. Elizabeth smiled at me with a special sweetness. Evidently she knew that the King was jealous, and was glad. But I saw that she did not mean to lose her good name. She gathered her ladies about her, curtseyed to King and Queen,

and asked their permission to retire for the night.

So at last I found a girl with some spirit, and she was the very one who must always be out of my reach.

The next day the Cardinal said to me: "It seems you're good friends with the Lady Elizabeth."

"I was talking to her about Italy, my Lord."

"No harm in that. She's . . ." he hesitated. "This must be a secret between us Tom. The King wants the Queen to name her as heir to the throne."

"But surely, my Lord, she's a bastard."

"Nevertheless, the Pope might grant a dispensation. Rather than have civil war, rather than bring our country to the state of Italy . . . Tom, God knows I have prayed it may never come to that! The Queen believes that she is pregnant, and surely, surely, this time God will let it be true! But Elizabeth is . . . a personage. She is to have her own household. She will need a secretary. Tom, if it were you . . ."

He saw my unease, but mistook the reason.

"Come, come, Tom! Surely you don't think I want to part with you? But this is for the safety of England. We are dealing with a very dangerous enemy."

Still I said nothing. He went on: "Elizabeth may mean to lead a rising. Don't you tell me, Tom, that because she's a woman, and young, she's incapable of that. We know that she's been promised help from France." He paused. "I am not saying that she has accepted that help. If I knew that, I would not be asking you to find out."

Silent, silent still, I stared, wondering if I had ever truly seen this man. He frowned.

"What's the matter with you, Tom? Here we are faced with one rising, one plot, one invasion after another—all the work of Protestants! I know what you're thinking, Tom. Elizabeth calls herself a good Catholic. She goes to Mass, she curtsies to the altar, she curtsies to the Queen. And with all these messages we know of, the messages to her from France, we

never can find a trace of a message to France from her. Her servants are all on her side, that's the trouble. If only we had one good and credible espial!"

His voice dropped. "Another thing. I believe she's not as virtuous as she pretends. If you could find *that* out . . ."

Now I did try to speak. But he hurried on: "Oh, yes, you could find out! You have this art of making women talk. And in this case especially . . . I've often heard you say that you thought Anne Boleyn died innocent. Why not say so to Elizabeth? Tell as much truth as you can!" And then he cried out impatiently: "Tom, I am asking you to do this because I trust you!"

I found words. "My Lord, I am honoured by your trust. But I fear that Elizabeth would not confide in me; she knows I have been an exile for the sake of the true Church."

He sighed at this, but agreed. And so I did not have to say: "My blood, my blood runs cold to find myself, after so long a journey, back where I began!"

# 13

Whenever I closed my eyes I saw the Lagoon, misted by a summer morning, and in the mist Venice, Venice . . . And Marco's words: "If ever you feel that your choice is between two impossible evils . . ."

But how could I feel that? The Cardinal was not evil. He intended nothing but the good of England, and the Church. I was troubled once by a thought that I could hardly have proved Elizabeth's lack of virtue, except by seducing her myself. I put that aside. It could not have been what the Cardinal meant. He was incapable of such a scheme. Besides, I loved him. I could never leave him. I could not leave England. For one thing, I had not found my son.

I had hunted so many times through so many papers, for the name "Thaxted", that I could not believe it when I found it at last. "Timothy Thaxted." It was on a list of twenty-two prisoners, to be tried for heresy the next day at Fulham Palace, before Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London.

We were now in the summer of 1557. Young Stafford had been executed some two months before, and the Cardinal seemed almost too tired to speak. Yet I had to trouble him.

"My Lord!" I said. "Please give me leave to go to this trial at Fulham Palace."

He frowned and asked me why.

"It troubles my mind," I said, "when I remember your

Lordship telling the King of France that he was not a fit person to judge heretics. My Lord, is Bishop Bonner any better? What was he but the willing tool of old King Henry? What sort of justice is he giving now to those poor ignorant souls, who do not know the meaning of heresy? My Lord, some of these people he burns cannot even read!"

The Cardinal did not seem so ready with an answer as he had been of late. He was more like himself when young—calling his thoughts back from some far-off country.

"Very well, Tom." he said at last. "Since this troubles you, go to Fulham Palace tomorrow. If you see anything done there but perfect justice, bring me a full report."

The next day was a rough one for August, and the tide was against the boatmen. So I reached Fulham Palace late. When I came into the great hall, Bishop Bonner was already in the midst of interrogating a prisoner. The Bishop's face was red and swollen with anger. It changed suddenly to an obsequious smile when I entered, because I wore the Cardinal's badge on my sleeve. But in a moment it changed back again, to its terrifying look.

The prisoner did not seem terrified. When the Bishop asked him: "Who taught you this damnable nonsense?" the prisoner said: "You did, my Lord. You taught us all to hate and despise the Pope."

"Oh, yes, yes!" said the Bishop, in the tone of a man who has heard his wife's nagging many times, and no longer thinks whether her words are true or false. "That's all past and done with now. We have returned to the Church. We know now that there is only one, universal Church."

The prisoner said: "Where were you, that dared not say so in King Harry's time?"

The Bishop snapped at him: "In King Harry's time you dared not say it either, so hold your noise."

The prisoner asked quietly: "Were you afraid of death in those days, my Lord?"

For a moment there was no answer, and the prisoner's voice went on echoing in my mind. I found it very strange. It was a rustic voice, a poor man's voice, with the accent of some Essex village. In such an accent a man should say nothing but: "Begging your pardon, sir. I'll hold the gate open for you, sir." Yet this man's voice came out as firmly, with as much assurance, as if he had been born a gentleman.

I saw now that the Bishop was looking puzzled, as well as angry. When he had collected his wits, he said: "Everyone is afraid of death, and so are you, for all your boasting. Why don't you take the chance we give you—to live, and repent! Return to the true church, as we have done!"

While he was speaking, I edged along the wall trying to get a closer look at the prisoner. I had to dodge past the fireplace, and, as I did so, I made the fire-irons clatter, and the prisoner looked round at me.

I was looking into my own face. My clean, clean-shaven face, as it had been twenty years before. The crooked nose, the eyebrow cocking skywards, the dark Spanish eyes—they were all there, and every feature hardened by a blind pride, which, I knew, must also have been mine.

I thought the prisoner must know my face as I knew his. But his eyes rested on me only for an instant. Then he turned back to his argument with the Bishop. What young lad would think he resembled a lined and bearded man, well past forty?

Forty . . . Forty-four . . . If this was the boy I had begotten when I was twenty, then he must be twenty-three. I whispered to one of the Bishop's men: "What's this prisoner's name?" The man looked at the list before him, and whispered back: "Timothy Thaxted."

Then where was Margaret? The hall was packed with faces, intently watching prisoner and Bishop. One face was watching

It was not a face I knew. It was not the lost beauty, which had haunted me all my life. This poor village woman might

well be the prisoner's mother; she stood as near him as she could, and her lips were pursed in trouble. But could my Margaret's face have grown so wrinkled, her body so thick and her hands so rough?

A man in an old leather jacket, who stood beside this woman, put his arm about her shoulders, and she turned away from me.

Bishop and prisoner were conducting a long argument, about transubstantiation. I could not understand it. I could not even hear. I was thinking: Italian peasant women are bent crones at forty. Why should I suppose that Margaret's life had been easier than theirs?

The Bishop shouted something at the prisoner; he was led away, and a door clanged behind him.

I had no authority to interfere. But I told the head jailor of the Bishop's prison that the Cardinal wished the prisoners to be visited freely by their friends. He replied that this was in any case the custom; a prisoner's own kinsfolk were the best people to persuade him out of dying for a stubborn opinion. "We don't *want* them to burn, sir."

I looked on with relief as Margaret went into the prison, her husband's arm still about her. They did not so much as glance at me as they passed. I thought they did not need me; they would know well enough how to talk sense into the lad.

But I could not rest. I paced up and down the Bishop's garden. In the bright sunshine of that August day, I seemed to be awakening from a dream. Was that old countrywoman really Margaret? Was that young man's face really mine? Or was I so much in love with myself that I saw myself mirrored everywhere?

I asked the jailor to let me go down into the prison.

It was so dark that at first I could see nothing. There was a sweaty smell, and a smell of ale and cheese. Gradually I made out a great vaulted cellar, with groups of people sitting about. The prisoners were eating the food their friends had

brought them. Besides, they were talking, and some, I thought were pleading, some weeping . . . But quietly, always quietly, in the new fashion of the English.

When at last I saw Timothy, I thought him the quietest of all. He was sitting on a bench between Margaret and her husband, talking very softly. As he talked, he smiled.

It was Margaret's voice I heard first. "Son, I never doubted you." And then the rough, common, villager's voice of Joseph. "I know I've raised a good hardy soldier of Christ."

And still for a minute I could not understand. Until I heard Timothy—still with that smile on his face—assuring them that he would not recant.

I cried out: "For God's sake, are you urging him into the fire?"

They all three seemed to notice me for the first time. Margaret sprang up and cried: "Leave us alone! Why must *you* meddle?"

I drew her aside, to a place where a little light came in. I whispered: "I'm trying to save the boy's life."

"What's that to you? Did you care when his life began?"

I saw the likeness then—the same dark eyes reproaching me from the wrinkles of this Margaret, as had reproached me from a young face long ago.

I said: "I swear I never knew that you were pregnant. When I heard it, it was too late; you were already married."

"And if you had known?" Margaret whispered. "Wouldn't you have told me what Mr. Cromwell told me—that you could not think of marrying a servant? You were born a gentleman."

That silenced me. She went on: "But I knew that from the first! I had no hopes of you, not when I loved you, not when I believed that I should die of loving. I remember, one day, I looked over the stairs and saw you come in from outside, and you sat down on the bench by the door and stretched your legs out, not even troubling yourself to call a servant, because you

knew a man would come running directly, to pull off your riding boots. Your legs thrust forward, your hard face expecting to be served. I could see you like that in my mind when Mr. Cromwell said: 'He's not for you; he was born a gentleman.'"

Her voice was gentle; what cried out against me were the wrinkles round her eyes.

I asked the first question that came into my head. "Does your husband beat you?"

"Never! Joe loves me. Why else would he marry me, in the trouble I was in? Do you think it was for the smallholding and the cottage? No; when he had nothing but his bag of tools, and I had nothing but my needle—he wanted to marry me then. And that last time he asked me, when I begged him never to think of me again, because I wasn't fit for any honest man—then, when he understood my trouble, he swore he would marry me in the world's despite."

"Have you been happy, then?" I asked.

"Oh! Until now—until Timothy was taken—there wasn't a happier woman in England."

I took her hands and turned them over, to see the calloused palms. I said: "You've worked hard."

"Like any countrywoman. Up at four, unless I was in childbed. But I'm so much better off than other women! Because Joe's beside me, working just as hard—never idle, never drunk. And then, when the work's done, and supper over, we always have that hour when Joe sits reading to us from the Gospels. Or from Tyndale, or 'The Supplication of the Beggars.' And we sit talking over what we've read, and sometimes a neighbour someone we can trust—comes to join in the reading and the talking. Oh, then there isn't a palace in the world more happy than our house!"

I thought of these poor zealots, egging one another on. "And this is how Timothy's grown up," I said.

"Yes, a good honest boy," said Margaret. "He never would have been in trouble if he hadn't been entangled in disputing

with a stranger. None of our neighbours would have denounced him; they respect him too much. You know, sometimes, when I look at Timothy, I feel sorry for you. If you had not been born of gentle folk—if you'd grown up to know the difference between right and wrong—then you might have been a good man."

Of all the heresies I'd heard, this was the most astounding. "Do you really mean," I asked, "that the gentlefolk have no sense of right and wrong?"

"What else can we think, after what's happened in our own lifetime? We were brought up to be Papists. Then, when King Harry turned, all the gentry and nobility turned with him. When he turned again, and began burning Protestants, none of these noblemen had a good word to say for the Gospel. Then in King Edward's time they were the hottest gospellers you ever saw. And now here they are again—all Papists! In all these changes there hasn't been one nobleman or gentleman with courage to stand to his faith and die for it. And only one gentlewoman—our dear beautiful Anne Askew. It's been left to us, the common people, to show that what we say we believe we do believe truly."

"But Cardinal Pole stood by his faith," I said. "I've seen with my own eyes how he suffered for it."

"I know his mother suffered," Margaret said. "And his brothers. He stayed out of the way. Now that it's safe, he's taking his revenge."

"No!" I protested. "The Cardinal is not what you imagine. The last thing to enter his mind is private revenge. Whatever he does, he does in all honesty. He is trying to save the souls of the people."

"With burning of books and burning of bodies?" asked Margaret. "There's noble blood for you—he's brought back ignorance and cruelty to England."

I tried to make her understand. "I was sent by King Henry

to murder him. It was his gentleness and goodness that converted me."

"So you're his hireling," Margaret said. "Just as you were Cromwell's hireling. You've never once been your own man and made a reckoning with your own soul."

She stopped to wipe away the tears which had suddenly started out of her eyes. The carpenter, who had been sitting all this while beside the young man, rose and said to me: "Sir, don't make my wife weep. She has grief enough."

He put his arm about her, as if she had been still a young girl. Then they went back to the bench. And they all three sat as before, the young man in the middle. Linked by more than their arms, they had a unity I could not break.

And yet I tried. I spoke to Timothy. "How can you be sure of something that even learned men find it hard to understand?"

"Sir," he said, "I have learning enough to read the Bible, and understanding enough to hear the voice of my conscience."

Margaret and her husband nodded, as if they were proud of the stubborn answer. I turned to the carpenter. "If you have any love for this young man . . ."

"Why should I not love him, sir?" said Joe Thaxted. "He is mine." He looked me in the eye, and I felt certain that he knew who I was. "The boy is mine. I was the one who held him in my arms when he was born. I was the one who took his hand when he began to walk. Our other children, sir, are girls. Fine, strong, beautiful girls. But still, to a carpenter, who wants to pass on his trade, there's nothing like a son."

"And yet you're urging him on to a terrible death!"

"So I should, sir, if the country was in danger, and he was wanted for a soldier."

"But you—" I turned to Margaret. "Surely you must have some doubt in your mind. What is there, in this faith of yours, worth your son's life?"

"Our faith is what we live by," Margaret said. "It has brought me all the life I've had—I mean since I have been

alive in my mind as well as my body. The dearest gift that Joe and I could give our children was the pure light of the Gospel. And if God requires our child to bear witness of that light, we must not set ourselves against God's will."

At this a woman near us cried out: "Amen!" And all the heretics began to sing one of their hymns. They deafened me I went out to the door, and put my forehead against the cool stone. A gentleman came to invite me to the Bishop's dinner table. I told him that I was too sick to eat, and went back to my boat.

I could not bear the slowness of the boat. I thought my heart would burst before I reached Lambeth Palace, and the presence of the Cardinal.

It seemed I was living again through that moment just after I had snatched away the assassin's pistol. Once again I was on my knees at his feet. Again I could not speak for weeping, and again I felt his hand moving across my brow to cool and bless.

When I could speak, I said. "If ever I have done you any service, reprieve one of the Bishop's prisoners, young Timothy Thaxted."

"Gladly," said the Cardinal. "If he has recanted."

"He has not," I said, "and probably never will. His mother and . . . and her husband are urging him to stand firm in the religion they taught him."

"Then how can you ask me to reprieve him?"

I said: "When I was young I seduced an innocent girl, and this man is my son."

The Cardinal exclaimed: "Praise be to God, who sees every secret sin!" Then he composed his face into a look of compassion.

"My dear Tom!" he said. "Every heretic is the child of some father and mother."

I said: "But this one's mine!"

"And God's," the Cardinal said. "As you are suffering at this moment, God suffers every time that one of his children is lost."

What kind of words would penetrate this kind of heart? I said: "If he dies impenitent, he's lost to God and me."

"Then tell him so!" said the Cardinal. "Tell him what a wicked thing you did, when you corrupted his mother's innocence. Tell him that the false father who taught him this false doctrine has been corrupting his innocence, and let him learn from you how to repent."

"Do you really believe . . . ?" I began. But there was no need to go on. From his gentle, inflexible face it was plain that the Cardinal *did* believe I could win the boy by defaming his mother and the only father he knew. The words that came to me were Marco Rafael's words, and this time I said them aloud. "How can you be so learned, and know nothing about the human heart?"

He was not angry, for he had a Biblical quotation ready. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Then he added: "I am very sorry for you, Tom."

With his accustomed graceful, aristocratic gesture, he waved me from the room. But I was not going.

"If you're sorry," I shouted, "why not show it? Show a little mercy to my son!"

My rude manner made him calmer than before. "Do I understand you aright?" he said. "This one man is to be treated differently from all the other heretics?"

"Yes!" I said. And then suddenly: "No! Have mercy on them all! Why not? They're English people, your own fellow-countrymen. We didn't understand, all those years we were abroad, we didn't know how they were changing. This terrible quietness, this turning inwards to search the conscience, this inflexible conviction of righteousness—all this is new in common people, and we don't understand it. But be merciful! Give them time!"

"For what?" said the Cardinal. "Time for what? To spread their poison? I've seen them! The people turn out in the street to comfort a heretic, even before he's tried. They give him

cakes and sweetmeats, hold out flagons for him to take a sip. You call that their conscience and their righteousness? What comfort did they give my mother when she was arrested? Where were they when that butcher hacked her body? My mother, whose blood should have brought down fire from Heaven!"

He was trembling, red with anger, and at last I saw him truly. He had come back to England not (as he himself believed) to gather up the lost lambs into the fold. Margaret was right; he had come to take revenge.

This was Reginald Pole, whom I should have killed long ago. I ought to have carried out the orders of King Henry, who understood men, and knew that this one was a danger to England . . . No, surely that could not be true. What ought I to have done? How ought I to have spent my wasted life? There must be another way. I cried out aloud: "God help me, if you will not!"

At this moment Michael came into the room, as he always did at this time, to bring us the household books. He said: "Why Tom, what's the matter?"

"The matter," said the Cardinal, speaking now in the tones of a quiet man at the end of his patience, "is that Tom has a bastard son."

"Don't be angry with him for that, my Lord!" said Michael. "He's not the only one. I have two bastards at Viterbo. I wept at leaving them behind—all the more bitterly, because I could not acknowledge them. They pass for the sons of a cobbler. I know it's not the act of a gentleman, my Lord, to corrupt a poor man's wife with gifts and money. Not even if the husband agrees to turn a blind eye. But my Lord, consider! How could any of us marry? We had not much to offer a wife, when we were in exile with you."

"How many other things," asked the Cardinal quietly, "have you been keeping from me?"

"Nothing, my Lord. We've served you as best we could.

I'm sure Tom has dealt honestly with your accounts. It's only our dealings with women, my Lord, which we don't find it easy to tell you, since you're vowed to celibacy, and we're not."

"Has it never entered your head," asked the Cardinal, "that even though you are not vowed to celibacy, what you have described is mortal sin?"

"Oh yes, my Lord!" said Michael. "I'm sorry for it every Easter, like a good Catholic."

"A good Catholic!" repeated the Cardinal. He sank back in his chair, like a man defeated.

I tried to stand, and found I needed Michael's arms. To Michael, as if the Cardinal were not there, I said that my son was to be burned only for his honesty, in admitting he was a heretic.

"You must tell him what I tell my nephews," Michael said. "It's not worth it! This difference between trans-what's-it and the other thing - between what we believe and what they believe - it's not worth a man's life! I tell them they should go to Mass and take Communion—take it without believing in it, like the rest. And then in time perhaps God's grace will work on them, and they *will* believe it, like we all do, in a sort of a way."

"Is this what I have to hear in my own household?" the Cardinal exclaimed.

He rose. He was about to leave us both. I had to be reconciled to him, and at once.

"My Lord!" I said. "I am, God knows, very sorry for my sins, and sorry in particular that I spoke rudely to you. My Lord! Please forgive me!"

A weary gesture indicated that he did.

"And my Lord!" I persisted, "Let me have a warrant, signed and sealed, to enter the Bishop's prison at any time, so that I can reason with Timothy Thaxted and bring him to the stake."

"If your reasoning is like Michael's" the Cardinal said,

"what sort of faith will you bring him to, I wonder? No! I shall do better than that. I shall have all twenty-two prisoners brought here, to this house. You may visit the young man, certainly, but under my supervision. It is time to see for myself what is going on."

At his order the prisoners were brought down the river from Fulham, and lodged in the Lollards' Tower, which is part of Lambeth Palace. But immediately after this the Cardinal was called away to Canterbury, where, it was reported, heresy had been preached in the very Cathedral. He took Michael with him, not, certainly, for the purity of his doctrine, but because the servants at his house in Canterbury were also out of hand.

I was left in charge of the household. I had no powers over the Lollards' Tower, only a permit to visit the prisoners. But, as soon as the Cardinal's back was turned, I used my money to make the head jailer give Timothy a room alone, still inside the Lollards' Tower, but above the other prisoners. It had a bell, pulled from inside the door, but sounding on the staircase for the jailor to hear. Whatever food or drink Timothy wanted, whatever comfort, he had only to ring for. But as for converting him—I thought I could more readily convert the Queen. Or, at least, move her heart.

The Queen, once more abandoned by her husband, once more disappointed in her hopes of a child, was now spending most of her days in bed. She could see nobody, except on urgent state business.

If I had learned nothing else in my life, I had learned the ways of a court. I knew which ladies in waiting could be bribed, and which I could move only by the telling of my story. There was one who flatly refused to help me. "I have my position to think of!" she said, and snapped her mouth as tight as a mousetrap. Her position was indeed a strange one; this was Frances, the mother of the would-be queen, Lady Jane Grey. Since the execution of her husband and

her daughter she had never ceased to rise in the world.

But the other ladies, for one reason or another, were willing to help me. And so at last I knelt at the curtained bedside of Mary Tudor, as I had knelt when she was a young girl.

"Your Majesty!" I pleaded. "You have shown mercy to so many!"

"Too many," said the woman whose worn face I could faintly see between the curtains. "That was my mistake in the beginning. The gratitude they showed me was to raise revolt again."

"But some have been grateful," I insisted.

"Who?" asked the Queen. "Who shows me any gratitude?"

I tried another tack.

"Your Majesty, I was with your mother, Queen Katherine, just before she died. Chapuys told her then that you had won even the hearts of your enemies by your kindness to the child Elizabeth. And your mother said: 'Mary will outlive her persecutors. She will be blessed, she will be beloved, so long as she remembers to return good for evil.' "

Mary tightened her thin lips, and then muttered: "I wonder if my mother really said that."

"On my faith as a gentleman—"

"Your faith!" Mary cried out. "What's *your* faith worth? You were set on my mother as a spy. You spied on me. It was your doing two of my servants were arrested; yes, and some poor soul who brought wood in a cart. What mercy did you ever have on them? The servants could not stand the torture; they accused Lady Salisbury. The man who brought the wood -I think his name was Arthur Bowers -refused to speak. He died--a priest who saw him in the Tower told me--he died blessing God who had given him the strength to keep silent on the rack."

What could I say to this, except that I had long ago confessed my guilt, and wept for it, and done penance?

Mary answered: "You all say you're penitent. When I look

round my Council table, I do not see one person who has not done me an injury. Oh, I am a Christian; I forgive them. But I will not give them the chance to do the same again. Treason must be destroyed. Heresy must be destroyed. From the highest to the lowest, I shall make no exception!"

I did not know how to tell Timothy of this merciless answer. But he was well prepared for it; he met me with a blind pride which made me think his face more than ever like my own. He looked at me, still, with no such recognition.

"Sir!" he said. "Why have you taken me away from my friends? I must tell you, if it's done to break my resolution, it will not succeed. I am not alone even here, sir; God is beside me, to keep me firm in my faith."

The determination of the Queen and Cardinal to kill my son was not more harsh than his determination to die. And only I, the sinner, the betrayer, who knew what it was to waste life, wanted this life saved. I alone could not believe that any great causes of church or state should set a young man's body writhing in a stench of roasted pork.

Alone, alone as I was, what could I do? I lay all that night weeping, as helpless as a woman. Before dawn I remembered Margaret's words. "You've never once been your own man and made a reckoning with your own soul."

I rose up at first light and called for hot water. Then I shaved off my beard.

And I was like him still; my son's face was my face, except that I had some wrinkles the beard had hidden. My body was as lean as his and as upright. My hands were whiter and finer, but hands can be hidden by gloves.

Nobody in the household asked me why my beard was gone. Nobody, indeed, spoke to me. Except the servant who took away my breakfast (which I could not eat, because of a dryness in my throat). He murmured: "Well, sir, at least *you* show some natural feeling."

"Servants know everything," Thomas Cromwell had said.

"The gentry always forget that." Of course if they had eyes they could see the boy was mine.

The goldsmith in Lombard Street knew me without my beard. "Like old times!" he said. I gave him notice that I would withdraw two hundred pounds in gold.

I knew when Margaret and Joseph were coming to see Timothy. I waited for them at the turn of the stair.

When she saw me clean-shaven, Margaret screamed. Joseph turned pale.

"I *am* like him, then?" I said. "So there is hope."

It was not my plan for Timothy's escape, wild as it was, that troubled me. I feared only one thing; the Protestant zeal for martyrdom. Having explained my plan, I sought for arguments which would convince these two.

"Since this resemblance is put into our hands, as it were by God, then surely it must be God's will that Timothy should escape? Your own sort, the reformers—hundreds of them—have gone to Frankfurt and Zurich. That's no cowardice, to go where you can plan and pray for better times."

They had drawn together as people do who are used to doing nothing without each other's consent. "If it *were* possible," Joseph whispered. "If he could go . . ." And Margaret whispered back: "Those with money have gone."

"I have money enough," I told her, "if Timothy will take it. Money enough, as well, to keep me comfortable in prison. Else perhaps I should not be so brave." I smiled at Margaret. "You told me long ago that the gentlefolk were more afraid of poverty than of death."

She cast her eyes down. It was Joseph who answered: "But sir, you *do* fear death. And, if you take his place, you may be burned."

"I think not," I said. "I cannot remember what the penalty is for helping a prisoner to escape, and I have not dared to inquire. But it's in God's hands." Now I spoke as I thought. "I am weary of my life. At every turn I am reminded of some

wrong, some hideous crime I had a hand in, some betrayal . . . If after all this I can save one innocent life, God may have mercy on me, quick or dead."

"You are right," Joseph said. "I see the hand of God in this. He works against your will, to save your soul."

"Oh yes, and our souls too!" said Margaret. "When I saw you with the Cardinal's badge on your sleeve, I thought of you with such a cruel bitterness that it almost separated me from the love of Christ. Now we shall always think of you with gratitude, with love."

So I left these two alone to convince Tmothy. I believe they did not tell him, even then, that I was his father. He seemed still to see nothing of himself in my face. But then, how much of his own face had he seen? He had a tiny scrap of polished metal which he looked into when he shaved himself. I suppose that he had never seen a proper looking-glass.

In the next few days I taught him how to carry a sword (not being a gentleman, he had never worn one) and how to answer the watch at night. I did not try to teach him any foreign tongue; it was trouble enough to make him say a few English words without his Essex accent. But I told him I would give him gold. "That speaks the same tongue anywhere," I said.

"My trade is the same anywhere," Timothy answered. "All I need is enough to reach Frankfurt; then I shall earn my own bread as a carpenter."

For this I respected him. But I did not find him good company. At first I had at the back of my mind a thought that if instead of being punished by imprisonment or death I were allowed to go abroad, I would join Timothy and live with him.

But as I came to know him better I saw that this would be impossible. I could not share his faith, much less the fervour with which he preached it. And he, though he thanked me for helping him, seemed not to feel any personal gratitude.

He took it for granted that I was one of "the Brethren." There were many like me, he told me, who had not yet found the courage to declare their faith. But, if I prayed, courage would come.

I did not contradict him. If he had known that I meant to save myself from the fire, by signing any creed which was put before me, he might have refused to escape. Let him think me a hero! Which perhaps I might be, in spite of myself. I might, like Cranmer, recant and still be burned.

Once I had his respect, I told him how he should behave in foreign parts. "Don't kiss a woman on the lips when you greet her, as we do here; you'll get a knife through your guts. Only bow at first, and then, if she holds out her hand to you, you may kiss that. Don't you meddle with any other man's wife; not even if you *know* he's away from home. No, nor with harlots; they'll give you the pox. And serving maids at inns may have the pox as well . . ."

I broke off because I saw Timothy's face.

"Well!" I said. "A young man should not go abroad without knowing these things."

"We in the Brethren," Timothy said, "look on a woman as a sister in God."

"But have you never kept company with one?" I asked.

"Kept company, yes," he answered carefully. "She left me to marry a corn-chandler for his money. Now she goes to Mass like the rest. It was my fault; I should have seen from the beginning that she was not really steadfast in the faith."

Trying to talk to Timothy, I knew why I had hesitated to choose a wife. How many people are there in the world whose talk I could bear to hear every day? I could think of only one —Marco Rafael.

It was pleasant enough to talk to Margaret. But then, we spoke of practical things, like the choice of a ship. There were several ships almost ready to sail from London to the Low Countries. But I could not tell which one Timothy ought to

take. It must be one with a Protestant captain, who would hide him when the customs officers came aboard at Gravesend. Joseph and Margaret consulted "the Brethren." They made sure of one ship, which was to sail at dawn, on the day the Cardinal was expected back from Canterbury.

I saw that the captain was paid. Then I bought Timothy some clothes for the journey and Margaret put them aboard so that he would not be seen to carry any baggage. There had to be a small boat to take Timothy from Lambeth Palace to London Bridge. I decided that it must be one of the Cardinal's own. I prepared the boatmen by telling them that I had some business in the City, and would need to travel after dark.

It was now the beginning of September. It would be fairly dark by eight o'clock, and at nine one of the Brethren would meet Timothy by the water stairs at London Bridge.

I began to prepare him before dusk. First, I made the jailor bring him a bowl, and a great jug of hot water. Then I told Timothy to stand in the bowl, and wash himself all over with the hot water. He thought this unmanly; he had never in his life washed in anything but cold water from the pump. But I was determined to get his peasant smell off him. When he was clean I took off my clothes. I did not put on his; they were sweaty, and rough to the skin. I wrapped a sheet round my waist and knotted it firmly, to leave my hands free, for I had much to do.

"The ruff hurts my neck," Timothy said.

"You have put it on upside down," I told him. Then I showed him how to tie it so that the strings would not show. My hose fitted him well enough, and we had made sure in advance of the shoes. My shirt was a little tight, and my doublet much too tight, for he had the shoulders of a labouring man. But we made the doublet meet in the front at last. I buckled my sword belt on to his waist, and showed him, once again, how to keep the sword out of his way as he walked.

When the cloak was on, to hide his broad shoulders, and the

gloves, to hide his labouring hands, and the hat, to hide the youthful blackness of his hair, he looked like . . . No, not like me, no longer like me, but like the legitimate son I should have reared.

I put a hundred pounds in the purse at his belt.

"It is too much," Timothy protested.

"No," I said. "You need enough to bring you back from Frankfurt. The Queen is ill; Elizabeth is well; and we may soon see better times."

This hope was the best thing I could give him, and the last, since it was time for him to go.

"God speed!" I whispered.

He kneeled down and asked me for my blessing. Perhaps, then, he did know I was his father. I blessed him, and when he rose up, that only time, I held him in my arms.

Then I rang the bell, and, when I heard the jailor coming, cried out in my ordinary voice for him to open the door. As he did so I rolled into Timothy's bed, pulling the sheet up to my brows. The jailor scarcely glanced at me. He was too busy letting Timothy out, saying respectfully: "Good night to you, Sir."

I heard Timothy walk slowly (as I had taught him) downstairs. When the jailor came back to look at me, before locking me in for the night, I pretended to be asleep. It was not hard for me to breathe deep and slow, like a man at rest with a good conscience. For at last (I felt) I was not a hireling; at last I had done one thing by myself.

The room was full of sunshine, and the jailor shaking me awake.

"Sir!" he whispered. "Sir, forgive me! I couldn't let you sleep longer; it's more than my life is worth. The lad's had his chance; he should be clear away by now."

*Servants know everything.* "But how did you know?" I asked.

"Why, sir, when you shaved off your beard, we all knew what you were up to. And good luck to you, sir; a man should

look after his own. We don't none of us hold with this new-fangled way of letting down your own family. But we're grateful to you, sir, for going about it so carefully. Now we can all pretend we thought the lad was you."

"Didn't anyone really think so?"

"We *tried* to, sir. But when he tripped over his sword, getting into the boat, and very near fell in the water, and said: 'Oh, God help me' in that hayseed voice of his, it was all we could do not to laugh out loud. The boatmen said afterwards—one of *them* wanted to tell, but the others threatened to hold him under the water. Which is their common way, sir, with informers. Because nobody makes much inquiry if a boatman's drowned."

I sat up. "Fetch me some clothes from my own room," I said. "And my breakfast. And the books from the table beside my bed."

"I will do, sir, but first I'll have to lock you in and raise the alarm and so forth. You *do* understand, sir? It's my place."

He raised the alarm with such a clatter that the other prisoners heard it. They began to sing hymns of rejoicing, all twenty-one of them together, and I had no chance of going back to sleep.

Presently the jailor came with breakfast, and my clothes.

"I've done my duty, sir," he said. "We all have. There's messengers gone to the Cardinal, and the Queen. We never thought to send anyone to Gravesend; perhaps a man will go there when it's too late. But sir, if I may ask—what's going to happen to you?"

"Perhaps death."

"What! When everybody knows you as the man who saved the Cardinal's life! Isn't it true, sir, that you fought hand to hand with a whole gang of robbers?"

"Not quite true."

"But surely, sir, he must feel *some* gratitude. Even *that* cold, unnatural—Well, no, sir; I won't say a word against our

master. But this I will say. Since he loves keeping accounts, let him take account of what you did for him!"

Towards evening I heard a great clatter of hooves in the courtyard, and guessed that the Cardinal must be home. The twenty-one heretics must have guessed as well; they began their hymns again. Soon the jailor unlocked the door saying: "Here, my Lord; he's locked up safe in here. He won't escape you." Hearing his eager, dutiful tone, I smiled.

The Cardinal came in and saw the smile. "At least *you* laugh in my face!" he said. "All the servants are laughing behind my back. No wonder, when I've been so easily tricked by such a self-evident scoundrel. Would it be unjust if I burned you, instead of your bastard?"

He glanced down as if expecting to see me on my knees. But I was upright before him, and remained so.

"Do as you think right with me, my Lord!" I said. "But if you burn me, it can hardly be for heresy. I am willing to sign whatever creed you desire."

"All creeds are the same to you," the Cardinal said.

"Not quite." I found myself shouting, so as to be heard above the noise of the hymns. "I hold to one thing; I will never again be the willing tool of a tyrant. Which you now are!"

He sat down on my bed and groaned aloud. I could see that the sound of the hymns was driving him to distraction. "You think you can all insult me now!" he said. "I suppose the secret's out. You must know that I have been recalled to Rome, to face a charge of heresy. And by my old friend Caraffa! How could he change like this, after becoming Pope? And the Queen—the Queen who made her submission to Rome at my hands not three years ago—has to save me now by forbidding the Pope's legate to land here."

This was all new to me, but I bit back my surprise and said: "My Lord, I know."

"You know! Of course you do; spying is your trade. And you're not the only one. Those nuns who used to follow

Vittoria were spies. Every word we said was reported to the Inquisition. No! Not reported—twisted. They might have let Vittoria lie quiet in her grave! They make out now that she denied free will, and the importance of good works. They say I founded the College of Viterbo to teach heresy . . . No wonder you laugh! You know I can't burn you. You know that I can't burn even that rabble down there. I cannot let it be known that I left an arch-heretic in charge of my own house! I shall have to send them all home."

"Thank God!" I said.

"Don't rejoice too soon!" he cried out. "It will all be put right. God will not let the Pope be mistaken for very long. The suppression of heresy *will* go on. And you—what you have done can be punished by secular courts."

"My Lord, you may send me to stand my trial," I said. "Then all my story will come out."

"And you'll be a hero to the Londoners! I know them. They care nothing for law and nothing for justice. All they say is: 'A man should look after his own.' That's what the servant said, who met me on my way from Canterbury. Before he'd even told me what you'd done, he was pleading for you. He said it was natural—as if that made it right! And then Michael—all the way along the road, I've had to listen to Michael reminding me that you've twice saved my life. What has all this to do with justice?"

"Nothing, my Lord."

"Get out of my sight!" the Cardinal said. "Out of this country! Go anywhere else on earth!"

"Even to Venice?"

"Yes, to Venice if you like, but go!"

So I came here, to live with Marco Rafael, and wait for better times.

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